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CHAPTER VI.

AN HONEST LAWYER.

THE difference between the probability and the certainty of death, however slight in degree, is very marked as regards the feelings of him who is threatened with it. Even in a 'forlorn hope' there is still a hope of life, and if there were none at all, there would be a great falling off in the number of volunteers. There are more people in the world, indeed, who wish to die than is commonly supposed, but still they are not numerous, and Mr. Joseph Tremenhere was certainly not among them. He had none of the fears that agitated Hamlet as regards the future; though his motto of 'No risks' was not perhaps utterly lost sight of even in that matter; but on the whole he was well content with this sublunary sphere, and he had a characteristic objection to exchange it for nothing—which was the alternative that he looked forward to.

After breakfast, on the morning after his 'shaking' (as he now called it to himself), instead of sitting in his parlour as usual awaiting the bright-winged flies of pleasure, he left his assistant to entertain them, and took his way on foot to the house of a well-known physician. It was not his own doctor, though he had great confidence in that gentleman, and made use of him in a manner very unusual; sent him a much larger crop of patients than

generally arises from the seed of individual gratitude, and took an interest in their well-being, which, but for its close connection with finance, would have stamped him as a philanthropist. But though he had many secrets in common with him, he did not wish to make him the depositary of his present apprehensions about himself. He preferred to consult a stranger. This resolve had its inconveniences; for he might have to wait his turn for admission, and waiting—where he was paying for it instead of being paid—did not at all suit with Mr. Tremenhere's humour. Who of us is so fortunate as not to be acquainted with that grim antechamber (the same all the world over) in which we await our summons to the (medical) hall of doom? When not used for its present purpose, it is a dining-room, but anything less suggestive of conviviality it is difficult to imagine. Will dainty dishes really in due course supply the place of those mouldy books and long-dead periodicals that lie on that funereal table? Will these miserable fellow-creatures that surround us, dyspeptic, pale, and silent, be succeeded by jovial guests? It seems impossible. Why do they look at each one as he enters with such serious disfavour, as if their chances of life were diminished by any addition to their numbers? It is because they believe that he has, like themselves, given a shilling to the butler to call him before his turn. In Josh's case they were wrong; for he had bribed the man with half a crown.

'Mr. Tremenhere, *by appointment*,' were the words that dropped with due solemnity from the lips of that discreet serving-man, the very next time he opened the door. It was even more improper in the patient than in the butler, but it should be charitably remembered that the Encyclopædia had warned him to avoid all mental emotions, such as impatience, and 'having to wait' was therefore bad for him. If those he had wronged could have seen Mr. Tremenhere's face when he emerged from his interview with the doctor, they would have had their revenge. He had gone in with the expectation of hearing bad news, but not with the certainty of it: he came out with the words of doom ringing in his ears. He had asked for the truth, in his plain-spoken way, and the truth had been told him. The doctor, knowing who he was, had taken an unusual interest in him; a wise doctor always does in such cases; human nature is almost as much his study as anatomy. This interest is quite independent of sympathy, or even pity. 'There is nothing so beautiful as a beautiful

skin—except a skin disease,' said an enthusiastic surgeon; and virtue is always a less attractive subject for moral diagnosis than its contrary.

Sentence of death had been passed upon the great money-lender. To most people in such circumstances money would have taken a very secondary place in their reflections, but in those of Joseph Tremenhère it assumed even greater proportions than usual. There was not a moment, as it seemed to him, to be lost in putting out of the reach of harm, of guarding from greed and waste and folly, that treasure, the amassing of which had been the darling object of his laborious days. If life must needs be lost, that at least should be saved, and in its entirety. The question *Cui bono*, for whose benefit it was to be saved, did not enter into his mind. The gold itself was the thing sacred to him, and required no temple to sanctify it. Curiously enough—though not so to those who are acquainted with the inconsistencies of human nature—Mr. Tremenhère, despite the fancy value that he placed upon his riches, had not yet made his will. The folly of such an omission had never struck him till last night, and that soliloquy of his, 'What fools we are, even the sharpest of us!' had referred to it. But *now* he felt that he had not only been a fool but a madman. Like one who has been living in a costly but wooden house, which constitutes his whole property, and suddenly remembers, 'I am not insured,' he stood amazed and alarmed at his own recklessness. The very idea of the risk he had run brought on another risk; his heart began to beat in an abnormal fashion; his terrified fancy pictured it as the premonitory symptom of that second 'seizure' which the doctor had warned him would probably be his last. Ten thousand pounds out of his huge hoard he would have given gladly for the hours, not of respite from death, but of freedom from distracting thoughts and fears, so that he might accomplish the all-important task that lay before him with a clear brain. His ideas upon the matter—his testamentary intentions—had long been made up; but all the complex plan would go for nothing unless he could communicate it to another.

He was in the street (how he got there he did not know), holding to a lamp-post, and looking to the passer-by like a man who had been overtaken, not so much by fate, as by liquor. It was fortunately a very quiet thoroughfare, chiefly inhabited by doctors, and he gradually came to himself without having attracted

public attention. He called a four-wheeled cab, and drove to a solicitor's office at no great distance, and here again, as in the doctor's case, he did not choose his own solicitor. He knew more than one gentleman of that profession, and was on much more intimate terms with them than is usually the case with lawyer and client, but he knew too much of them to wish them to know so much about him as it had become necessary to disclose. Mr. Allerton was a solicitor with whom indeed he had had dealings, and of a confidential nature, but they had not been amicable dealings. He had acted for Lord Morella in connection with certain transactions which the money-lender had had with his lordship's son and heir, and had expressed himself rather strongly on Mr. Tremenhere's course of conduct. He had even gone so far as to say, in a conversation to which there were no witnesses, 'It is my opinion, Mr. Tremenhere, that you are acting like a rogue in this matter.'

But insinuations of that sort had never made the money-lender's heart 'go;' he was too much accustomed to them; moreover he had got the better of the lawyer in the affair in question, and could have afforded to put up with even stronger vituperation at the same price. He had a large charity under such circumstances for hasty expressions, and not only bore no malice because of them, but rather respected him who uttered them for his candour and perspicacity. There is a foolish saw about rogues believing all other men to be as roguish as themselves; but he must be a poor rogue indeed, and little likely to succeed in his calling, who entertains any such belief. There is no one who understands the advantage of genuine honesty—and in his way appreciates it—better than your clever scoundrel. He may dislike the honest man exceedingly, but if he says he despises him, he is a liar. He has in truth a much higher opinion of him than of any one in the same line of business as himself.

Mr. Allerton was what many people consider a rarity, an honest lawyer; but he had characteristics of a still more unusual kind. It was cruelly said of one of his profession who pretended to have them, that though a professing Christian he was a practising attorney; but Mr. Allerton was really a religious man. How it came about was of course a subject of great speculation. His detractors said that since Lord Morella, his chief client, was one of the great leaders of the evangelical party, it was only natural—meaning that it was to his obvious interest—that Mr.

Allerton should be evangelical too; but those who said so knew little about him, or were very shallow critics. With this side of that gentleman's character, however, Mr. Tremenhère did not concern himself; he never meddled with matters he did not understand; but he knew that Mr. Allerton was an honest and trustworthy man, and for that reason, and that reason only, he was about to entrust him with the knowledge—and he hoped the management—of his private affairs.

On arriving at the lawyer's office, he was shown into the waiting room, which he was well pleased to see unoccupied, and sent in his card. The clerk who took it came back with promptitude, and the intimation that Mr. Allerton was very particularly engaged. If Mr. Tremenhère had any communication to make, he added, Mr. Allerton would be very happy to receive it—in writing.

Not the least disturbed by this rebuff, Mr. Tremenhère sat down and wrote, as requested, just half a dozen words.

'My business is of the most pressing importance, and has nothing whatever to do with Lord C.'s affairs.'

This he sealed with wax before confiding it to the messenger.

'Just give Mr. Allerton *that*,' he said, with the air of a man who knows its contents will be attended to. Nor was his confidence misplaced. The clerk returned, though by no means immediately, with a civil request that Mr. Tremenhère would 'walk this way.'

He knew the way very well, for he had often trodden it on no very agreeable errands, and the last time had been the occasion on which that injurious remark had been applied to him which the exigencies of our story have compelled us (with much regret) to quote.

Mr. Allerton was a short, thin, wiry man, not much above middle age, but with a gravity of countenance that made him appear older than he was. He looked even graver than usual as the money-lender was announced, rose from his chair without, however, moving foot or hand, and, looking keenly at his visitor through his spectacles, inquired in a tone that was far from conciliatory, 'To what am I indebted, Mr. Tremenhère, for this entirely unexpected visit?'

'I want your professional assistance on a matter of great moment, but not a disputed one, and solely in connection with my own affairs.'

'Then I think you had better go elsewhere, sir; to speak frankly, I have no desire to be connected with them, or with you, in any way. I have no interest in your affairs, Mr. Tremenhare.'

'I venture to think that you will alter that opinion if you will have the patience to listen to me for five minutes,' was the money-lender's quiet rejoinder. 'I am very unwell; will you permit me to take a chair?'

The lawyer frowned, but nodded; his face had not one touch of sympathy; he seemed to be saying to himself, like the diplomatist who heard that his astute rival was dying, 'I wonder what he does that for.'

'I am quite aware, Mr. Allerton, of the opinion you entertain of me; and have neither the time, nor, to say truth, the desire to attempt to controvert it. I know that I have no claim upon your attention whatever, save one, our common humanity.'

'Those are strange words to come from your lips, Mr. Tremenhare,' said the lawyer coldly, but looking at his visitor with some curiosity too. He was obliged to acknowledge to himself that the man looked ill, and the sense of having wronged him so far had its effect on him.

'I have just come from a doctor's consulting room, who is not given to false predictions, and he has told me that my life hangs on a thread. Let the extreme urgency of my case excuse, at least, my intrusion.'

'But why come to *me*, Mr. Tremenhare? You have friends of your own, as I have reason to know, learned in the law.'

'Rogues all,' interrupted the money-lender curtly; 'rogues all. I come to you because you are an honest man.'

A dry smile parted the lawyer's lips.

'You think that a strange reason to actuate *me*, Mr. Allerton. You may think anything you like, if you will only act for me. I want you to make my will.'

The lawyer shook his head. 'I have no hesitation in saying that I positively decline that honour.'

'Do you refuse to oblige a dying man by performing an ordinary duty of your profession? This is not what I expected of one whose name is synonymous with good feeling as well as honesty. In any other case I should have appealed at first to an instinct which in yours, as I am well convinced, has less influence, namely self-interest. I propose to give you a thousand pounds for this great service.'

'A thousand pounds!' Mr. Allerton was human, and in whose bosom beats the heart where the notion of earning a thousand pounds in an hour or two does not touch some sympathetic chord? He was moved for a moment; then suddenly recovering himself, he exclaimed with some heat, 'You must be insulting me, sir; your intention must be to bribe me to do something dishonourable.'

'A very natural supposition, I admit,' said the money-lender blandly. 'But your suspicion is quite without foundation, as you will soon be convinced. I ought to have added that the sum in question is contingent upon your accepting the executorship.'

'The executorship! Do you suppose I am going to draw up a will out of which I am myself to receive a thousand pounds?'

'Why not? It is no ordinary will, I promise you. If it were five thousand, there would be nothing strange or uncommon, if it were in due proportion to the bulk of the whole bequest, and in this case that is a million of money.'

Even in the perilous state in which the money-lender stood—with the grave, as he felt, gaping for him, and all the things of this world, which had had so magnetic an attraction for him, slipping from his grasp—he uttered those last words with a certain proud complacency. Nor were they without their effect upon the lawyer himself. He was used to deal with large sums, but he knew how seldom a fortune of this size was placed at the sole disposal of a single individual. There was wonder—perhaps even a gleam of admiration—in his keen grey eyes; he was dazzled in spite of himself.

'Of course,' continued the money-lender, 'a man in your position, who is so good as to undertake this trust, will not be treated as a layman. There may be—there must be—many obligations connected with it, the discharge of each of which will, of course, receive its proper remuneration. If I were speaking to some lawyers whom you and I know, I should say, "There will be pretty pickings;" but I am well aware that such considerations will have little weight with you. What I would rather dwell upon is the opportunities such a position will afford you of administering a vast estate to good advantage—the advantage, that is,' he added hastily, 'of helpless and innocent young people—for I have three daughters, Mr. Allerton, who are not so well acquainted with finance as their father, and will doubtless stand in need of your advice and assistance.'

The latter part of this statement would have been the reverse of attractive to most persons, but Mr. Tremenhare knew his man. Mr. Allerton was not averse to play the part of mentor to his clients; nor can we doubt that the knowledge that in this case he would be handsomely paid for it, had its weight. Moreover, which was a great point with him, he would be robbing no one. If the money was the orphan's, it was not the sort of orphan that we are in the habit of associating with the widow; his little charges would be mere flea-bites to her. He felt much as the honest divine feels who is translated to another benefice, that it would be 'a wider sphere of usefulness,' and also involve an increase of stipend.

The lawyer looked at Mr. Tremenhare as certainly he had never thought to look—with something of personal interest as well as curiosity—as he replied:

'Well, well, we'll see about it. I'll think it over.'

CHAPTER VII.

THE WILL.

WHEN a man says on any previously debated question (provided it is not an appeal to his pursestrings) that he will 'think it over,' his antagonist may generally congratulate himself on having gained his point; and under ordinary circumstances Mr. Tremenhare would have felt satisfied with the success he had so far achieved in a not very promising case. But there was that within him that 'voted urgency' in this matter, and made procrastination almost one with failure.

'You are forgetting, Mr. Allerton, what I told you about the state of my health; whatever is to be done, it above all things behoves me to do it quickly.'

There was that in the money-lender's words that reminded the lawyer of the unjust steward, and for a moment he hesitated as to whether he should comply with his request or not; that he was touching pitch there was no doubt whatever; but his hands were at least less likely to be defiled by it than those of any other man whom Mr. Tremenhare would be likely to employ; and then there was the thousand pounds down, and the pickings, and the opportunities for good.

'I suppose I must oblige you, Mr. Tremenhere,' he said with a sigh, which blew away his last remnant of opposition, and the two men drew their chairs together. Like adversaries at whist, who cut and find themselves in partnership with one another, their old antagonism ceased at once, and they became lawyer and client.

Though Mr. Tremenhere's fortune was so immense, it was not one of those properties which, like port wine, takes time to settle. Almost the whole of it, save his Cumberland estate and his lease of Lebanon Lodge, was in what might be almost termed hard cash; securities, a list of which he had taken the precaution to bring with him. His knowledge of business matters was fully as great as that of his companion, and he knew exactly what he wanted—an attribute rare indeed, and which facilitates the operation of will-making above all others. Moreover, all that he desired at present was a synopsis of his intentions, duly witnessed, which, though valid in itself, might afterwards be expanded into a larger testament, should time and health be granted to him. This last circumstance, as it happened, was of great service to him in overcoming, here and there, certain objections on the lawyer's part, who would certainly have shown a more obstinate front but for the thought of the better opportunity that would presently be afforded him of arguing the matter.

'I set this down under protest, Mr. Tremenhere,' he said more than once; 'I hope you will remember this.' And at the words, 'To my faithful clerk and assistant Edward Roscoe I bequeath the sum of 5,000*l.*,' he could not restrain an ejaculation of astonishment. It was an unusual thing to do, of course; the will-maker should be a machine in such cases; but then he knew the gentleman—not personally but in his relations with his client—so well.

'Quite so; I know what you are thinking, Mr. Allerton,' said the money-lender, 'as though you spoke it. He has feathered his nest pretty well for himself, no doubt, and out of my birds; but this is a promise. He saved my life last night, when he might have let me die, and greatly to his own advantage. It cannot happen now, as I shall frankly tell him, in case the temptation should occur again and be too strong for him. But one must keep one's word. You will do me the justice to say, I think, that I have always done that much.'

Mr. Allerton inclined his head assentingly; he could do so

without scruple ; Josh's word had always been as good as his bond, which could only in a facetious sense have been said of most of those he dealt with. His will had been strong, but his promise had been irrefragable, however much to his disadvantage might have been its performance.

There were items in Mr. Tremenhere's testamentary instructions which went more against the grain with Mr. Allerton than that legacy to Mr. Roscoe ; and though he looked upon the document as a temporary one, or rather as a Bill in Parliament which the Opposition permits to pass upon the understanding that it shall be altered in committee, he did not hesitate to express his disapproval of it.

'I call this will of yours a cruel will, Mr. Tremenhere,' he said deliberately when all was done.

'I am cruel only to be kind,' answered the money-lender.

'That is of course your view ; I do not accuse you of positive injustice, or I should not be acting for you ; but in my opinion you are flying in the face of nature. Those who are dearest to you will think so, and not thank you for it.'

'Then that will be because they don't know what is good for them,' was the quiet rejoinder.

'They know better than you do,' replied the lawyer curtly ; 'what seems to you the highest good, at all events,' he added in a more conciliatory tone, 'will not seem so to them. Money is not everything, Mr. Tremenhere, to everybody, even in this world.'

'No doubt ; but if they prefer something else—call it by what name you will—there is nothing here to prevent them indulging their inclinations. If they choose to be Quixotic they can be so, and yet not starve.'

'Yes, fortunately for your intentions there are certain "gifts over," independent of the conditions ; but even so, if this testament should be disputed, it is my duty to tell you that it is by no means unassailable.'

'Do you mean to say that a man cannot leave his own money as he pleases ?' inquired Mr. Tremenhere scornfully.

'Certainly not, in all cases,' returned the lawyer dryly. 'I do not say, however, that all I have set down here is not perfectly legal ; but the Court is always prone, and rightly prone, to look with a jealous eye, unless there are the strongest reasons for it, on any restraint.'

‘And is religious scruple not a reason?’ put in the money-lender, with virtuous indignation.

Mr. Allerton passed his hand over his lips to hide a smile.

‘That also has been a point to be decided by the judge, ever since Lord Hardwicke’s time. However, as I have told you, the conditions are perfectly legal. But I say again, Mr. Tremenhere, that it is a cruel will.’

‘I am sorry that you entertain that opinion, but I think a father should be the best judge of the interests of his own children. Outside that, if you have any objection to offer, I am ready to hear it.’

‘Then permit me to say that I think this conditional reversion of your property towards the discharge of the National Debt is very little to your credit. It surprises me more than your other provisions, though it shocks me less. I should have thought a man like you would be above such egotism.’

‘Very good,’ said the money-lender, indifferently, ‘let us strike that out.’

This ready compliance with his suggestion amazed the lawyer and gave him hopes. It was plain that the expression of his views had no little influence with his strange client; and it surely behoved him to do his best to guide him aright.

‘Mr. Tremenhere,’ he said, in a tone very different from that he had hitherto used, ‘you have just now asked me to bear witness to your fidelity to your word; may I ask you, in return, to believe that I am no hypocrite?’

‘I am quite sure that you are not,’ answered the other simply; ‘if I had thought so, I should not be here.’

‘Then let me adjure you to think again before you leave this legacy of wrong behind you. Do one good act, at all events, upon which, when you come to lie on your death-bed, you may look with satisfaction.’

‘I shall have no death-bed,’ was the dry rejoinder. ‘I shall die suddenly, Mr. Allerton; very likely in the street.’

‘Then between this and then, let there be something on which your mind can rest with comfort. I cannot see into your mind, but I am much mistaken if there is not something that troubles it. You are not so satisfied with what you have just done here’—he laid his finger on the will—‘as you would have me believe.’

‘I am perfectly satisfied with it.’

‘I am sorry to hear it; it is not my business to speak of such

things, but is there *nothing* you repent of, and for which even now some reparation can be made?’

The speaker was like one who shoots at a venture, but where he knows there is plenty of game.

‘Yes!’ interrupted the money-lender sharply; ‘there is no need to go into the matter, but there *is*. I am obliged to you for reminding me of it. Instead of my property, in the contingencies referred to, reverting to the State, let it in the first instance revert to Robert Vernon—Heaven knows where he is now, but you may say some time of Cockermouth.’

‘A relation?’

‘Yes; the only one I have in the world—my cousin.’

‘There is some sense in *that*, at all events,’ observed the lawyer, as he made the alteration in favour of Robert Vernon or the heirs of his body. He had seen too much of the ‘pious founder’ to have any respect for *him*, and he had almost as much objection to the posthumous benefactors of the State.

Then he copied out the will with his own hand, and two of his clerks came in and witnessed it.

‘You have laid me under a great obligation,’ said the money-lender, when all was done.

‘You will best discharge it, Mr. Tremenhere,’ returned the other gravely, ‘by taking a juster view of your responsibilities when we are treating this affair at large.’

Mr. Tremenhere smiled and held out his hand, which, this time, was not refused.

As ‘a fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind,’ so a common interest unites those who would be otherwise as far asunder as the poles.

‘If you would call in some day and make the acquaintance of my girls, Mr. Allerton, I should take it as a great kindness. It will make things easier for them afterwards. You know Lebanon Lodge?’

‘Very well,’ replied the lawyer; but whether the answer referred to the invitation, or only to his knowledge of the locality, was doubtful.

Mr. Allerton knew Lebanon Lodge well enough, but hitherto it had certainly not been one of the places on his visiting list. What would Lord Morella say, he wondered, with his dry smile, if he came to know that Josh Tremenhere had become a client of his?

The money-lender left Mr. Allerton's office in a more tranquil frame of mind than that with which he had entered it. Even physically his visit to the lawyer had benefited him as much as that to the physician had depressed him. He felt that so far as the future was concerned—for Mr. Tremenhere's horizon was a very limited one—he could now snap his fingers at Fate. His reflections were no longer personal, as they had been a few hours ago; his mind was free to concern itself with others. He was just as likely to die as before, of course, but the matter was not so pressing or important, and he could speculate upon it apart from himself. What would become, he wondered, with a grim smile, of that wild team of thoroughbreds he had so well in hand, but of the management of which none but he possessed the secret? How they would rear and bolt, and kick over the traces, and upset the coach, when he should be no longer on the box-seat! Roscoe thought a good deal of himself as a whip, no doubt, but he would probably make a precious mess of it. Mr. Tremenhere felt the same satisfaction in contemplating the overturn as did the diplomatist who observed 'After me the Deluge.' Roscoe would step into his shoes, no doubt, and try to wear them, unless indeed he contemplated that shorter way to wealth of which he had so lately accused him. Whether he did so or not was not of much consequence now; but either way there would be disappointments for Roscoe. Five thousand pounds is a large bequest to one who is no relation to the testator, but he was well aware that it would not satisfy the legatee in this case. He would look for more than half per cent. of what his employer left behind him; for he had good reason to expect to be left executor. It is not always a judicious act, however, to make a poacher one's game-keeper. How he would stare to find Allerton's name, of all names, in that little document that had just been executed, instead of his own! And, above all, how the document itself would make him stare!

'You are not so satisfied with it as you would have me believe,' the lawyer had said; but he was perfectly satisfied with it. 'A juster view of your responsibilities,' forsooth; that was the only bit of cant which the other had indulged in—that and his absurd remark that the girls knew what was good for them better than he did. Why Allerton didn't even know the girls. Would he call, he wondered, and see Grace? She would be certain to interest him, and it would be well indeed for his little Fairy to

do so—to have some one, outside Lebanon Lodge and all belonging to it, to whom to apply for counsel.

He was walking through the Park beside the Row, but at the upper end of it, where there were few people, and sat down on an empty bench to rest a little.

His little Fairy! She was the only being, as he believed, in all the world that would regret him; and even so would be regretting some one else that was not himself at all. It would be better for her that he should go before her eyes were opened. If his chances of life had been good, things might have been very different. As he thoughtfully puffed at his cigar and watched the smoke, a picture rose before him of what might have been. He saw himself 'retired from business;' greatly looked up to by the world at large on account of the money he had made, but with no desire—and this was the strangest part of his dream—to increase his store. He had no friends, for he had never made any, nor sought to make them; but there was one house which was always open to him, and where he was welcomed by its mistress with open arms. It was one of those 'stately homes of England' at whose size and splendour foreigners stand amazed; a place he had seen pictured many times. Its master was a young fellow he had always liked, but there had been faults and flaws in him of old which no longer existed. He was a peer of the realm, but also a good husband. There were little children in the house, one of them the image of his little Fairy, as she had looked some twelve years ago or so, and they called him 'Grandpapa.'

It was rather a snobbish and pinchbeck dream, perhaps, but such as it was it soothed and pleased him wonderfully. He felt quite annoyed when a couple of riders, passing at full speed, aroused him from it.

'How are you, Josh?' one called out as they swept by, and afterwards the breeze brought to his ear from both of them—or so it seemed to him—a sound of mocking laughter.

The horsemen were Lord Cheribert and General St. Gatien.

There was nothing of novelty in the incident; certainly nothing that under ordinary circumstances would have ruffled the money-lender; but, just now, it did ruffle him.

'I have been an old fool,' he murmured; 'but only for five minutes. It shall never happen again. St. Gatien yonder was once good enough to tell me that he had heard Josh Tremenhere

called all sorts of names, but that he had never heard anybody call him a fool. And I'll take good care that it never shall be so.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRE.

THE niceties of religious scruple are among the most curious things in human nature, and not the less so to those who entertain them—though in a different form from those which excite their wonder—themselves. I have seen an excellent young woman, devoted to suet pudding and treacle, take the pudding without the treacle because the day was a Friday. I have known a man, who wouldn't touch a card on Sunday for the wealth of the Indies, play at bagatelle without a prick of conscience. It is in the matter of amusement, indeed, that these refinements of propriety are most observable. In what is called 'the religious world,' for example, to take a walk upon a Sunday (except in some parts of Scotland) is permissible, but to mount a tricycle is sacrilegious; to attend dramatic representations is held to be impious, but to listen to Shakespeare Readings is an innocent recreation. The opera is a synonym for the infernal regions, but the concert-room is a place which the best of men can patronise without risk of their eternal welfare.

That a person of good sense and intelligence like Mr. Allerton should strain at these gnats, and yet be a solicitor in large practice, may seem strange; but he did other things quite as unwarrantable in the eyes of reason, which the world at large was not at all surprised at. He was a bachelor, and had no one to work for but himself; he was not greedy for gain, and yet he passed eight hours a day in a dingy office, adding to a fortune that was already far too large for his simple needs. For my part, such conduct seems the act of an idiot; but other people may think *me* an idiot for indulging in *my* little eccentricities, which travel in another direction. We all possess glass houses of some kind or another—though yours and mine, reader, are mere cucumber frames—and should not throw stones.

Mr. Allerton was very fond of music, though he would not have listened to an orchestra in a theatre to oblige Lord Morella himself (and, indeed, it was very unlikely that his lordship would

have asked that favour of him); and he thought it no harm, a few nights after his interview with Mr. Tremenhare, to find himself sitting in a stall at the new Harmony Hall in South Kensington.

It was an edifice the old lawyer knew something about, for he had been the solicitor to the company who built it, but it was not on that account that it now enjoyed his patronage; he would have gone anywhere else, and at no small inconvenience to himself, to hear such singing as its programme promised him to-night. He had come early, though not so much from fearing to miss any of it as from habit—you could be five minutes too late for everything in the world worth having, he used to say, but you could not be five minutes too soon—and he amused himself by watching the house fill. He was a little deaf, and had consequently taken a stall close to the stage, and he stood up with his back to it, opera-glass in hand, and looked about him. There were a good many people he knew, and they him: for the most part, quiet, unfashionable folks, very different from the sparkling throng that chat and smile with one another at the playhouse; he thought little of them at the time, but circumstances afterwards arose which caused him to remember them all very particularly. In his vicinity, however, there were only strangers. Presently a party of three entered the house, one of whom at once arrested his attention. She was a young girl of great beauty, but what attracted him in her was the animation and pleasure that lit up her face. Scenes of public amusement, it was plain, were unfamiliar to her; and she was looking forward to her coming treat with childish expectation. Innocence has an attraction, it is said, for lawyers, but for this one it had a peculiar and quite unprofessional charm; like the spectacle of a fair landscape at early dawn, it seemed to do Mr. Allerton good. He was so rapt in contemplation of the girl that only the sense that she was growing much too large reminded him that he might be bestowing an unacceptable attention on her. She was coming very near him, and he shut up his glasses rather hastily and took his seat, and consulted his programme. When he looked up from it he perceived, not without satisfaction, that she was sitting next to him.

‘What a wicked old man!’ some people would have said, had he confessed as much; but ‘some people’ are unable to appreciate the finer pleasures; what he looked forward to was a reflected happiness, the delight he knew would be aroused in that charming and innocent face at what she had come to hear. Beside her,

of course, were sitting her two companions, one of them a tall, well-built man, of powerful frame, and with a face that most persons would have pronounced handsome; when he smiled, it was certainly so, but when he was not smiling, it struck the lawyer that it had a sinister expression. He was dark, like the young lady, but had no other resemblance to her; he could hardly be her father, yet his manner to her seemed parental, affectionate, and almost playful in its protective kindness; with the other, a commonplace young woman, tolerably good-looking, and with very bright eyes, he was familiar, but less demonstratively so. Mr. Allerton concluded, though there was a considerable difference in their ages, that the party were brother and sisters.

The performance was musical as well as vocal, and when the notes of the organ, 'like a god in pain,' began to fill the hushed air, 'it was pretty' (as Mr. Pepys with much inappropriateness would have said) to watch the changes that swept over the girl's speaking face. At times, even, thought Mr. Allerton, in his 'serious,' commonplace way, she seemed to be communing with the blessed angels themselves; at others, the dew stood in her eyes and an intense melancholy seemed to hold possession of her, caused, perhaps, by some exaggerated sense of her own unworthiness.

When the first singer came to the front she was less moved, but not less pleasant to look upon, for she was more herself. The song was a very difficult one, and tried the vocal powers to the utmost; she seemed to follow every note and sympathise with every obstacle surmounted, and her small hands met together at the close with eager appreciation. But with the enthusiasm it evoked in some quarters it was plain she had no sympathy; it touched the sense for her, but not the soul. Then came a simple ballad, such as when trilled by a cracked voice in the streets will reach the heart, but when sung, as now, by one formed by art and nature to do justice to it, makes the whole world of listeners kin. In the midst of it, whilst the girl was weeping with bowed-down head, Mr. Allerton and her companion shot a glance at one another over it, full of dread significance. There was smoke proceeding from one side of the stage, followed by a solitary tongue of flame.

'Fire! Fire!' screamed some one from the gallery, and the whole house rose at once as at the National Anthem, only a great deal quicker,

'Fire! Fire!' was echoed in a dozen places, and all that decorous, respectable assemblage was transformed in another instant to a Pandemonium.

It is easy to say 'What cowards!' as we read of such things in our own chairs at home, with the serene conviction that if such an event had happened to ourselves, we should have been as cool as cucumbers; but the fact is there is a thing called 'panic' against which ordinary courage—the courage of the soldier—struggles in vain; even the Die Hards, we read, were once victims to it. Nevertheless there were a few exceptions to the general stampede that at once took place from every part of the concert room. Mr. Allerton's first thought was for the girl beside him. He heard her companion exclaim, 'Keep your seats, both of you!' by which he knew that he was well fitted to be a protector to one of them; but it was also plain that in that raging rout no one man, however strong and resolute, could save two helpless women. The same thought, he saw, was passing through the other's mind. Even in that awful moment the passions depicted on that swarthy face did not escape his observation; its vehement resentment of the Fate that seemed about to overtake them, and then the terrible struggle as to which of his two charges should be his care, could be read distinctly in it; and finally—though the whole thing did not take a moment—the man's eyes fixed themselves on the elder woman.

'I will take care of the young lady,' said the lawyer, in quiet but unhesitating tones.

'Thank you, Mr. Allerton,' returned the other, a flush of gratitude lighting up his dark features; 'there is not a moment to lose.'

If there had been, the fact of being addressed by his own name would certainly have struck the lawyer; but at the time he was unconscious of aught but the peril to which the other referred. The flame was already licking the side scenes, and the heat was becoming unbearable; the advice of 'Keep your seats' to those who, like themselves, were near the stage could no longer be followed. The two men helped the women over the backs of the emptied stalls to the last row, and waited for the doorway to be cleared. The spectacle was frightful. The room itself, in spite of the myriad lights that hung about it, was getting dim with smoke, but they could see the remnant of the frantic crowd fighting and tearing at one another at the narrow exit like fiends incarnate. The

girl released her arm from Mr. Allerton's hold, and covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out the shocking scene. She had not spoken a word from first to last, but had done exactly as he had instructed her to do; whereas her sister had uttered shriek on shriek, and had been so possessed with terror that her companion had had to carry her in his arms over the last three rows of stalls. In spite of their terrible situation this had aroused his anger.

'If you mean to perish miserably, you are going the way to do it, Philippa,' he exclaimed in passionate tones; 'whereas if you will but keep your feet and stick to me, I will cut my way through these cowardly fools;' and he had looked at them as he spoke so savagely that it was easy to imagine him, hatchet in hand, putting his threat into execution. His words, however inappropriate from a moral point of view, were not without their good effect upon the person he addressed, and revived her not a little, as harshness is said to bring to themselves persons in hysterics. She murmured something in his ear, to which he nodded a grim assent.

Mr. Allerton would have been incapable of applying such strong remedies, even if the case of his companion had called for them, but he too addressed to her a few words of quiet assurance.

'The doorway will soon be clear, my dear,' he said; 'and you may be sure, whatever happens, that I will not desert you.'

She looked up in his pitiful eyes with an expression of ineffable gratitude, reading the generous and earnest purpose in them, and murmured her simple trust in him. It seemed to both these strangers of five minutes ago that they had known one another for years. By this time the fire had wrapped the whole of the stage, and sparks from they knew not whence were flying in all directions. They all moved hastily towards the door, now blocked by only a few stragglers, and presently emerged with them into a low and narrow passage. Except that the fire was for the moment hidden from view, their position seemed now even more hopeless and inextricable. A compact mass of human beings, their features distorted with rage and fear, their garments torn and dishevelled, and trampling one another under foot with the most shocking indifference, filled the entire space between them and the entrance hall.

'There are no stairs,' Mr. Allerton heard his male companion mutter, as if to himself; then aloud, 'Philippa, put your arms

round my waist, and if you loose your hold, remember, you lose your life.'

As he spoke the words, he threw himself on the struggling throng, and by sheer strength, like a wedge beaten by the hammer, forced his way slowly through it, dragging his companion after him.

'I have not the strength for that,' murmured Mr. Allerton, 'even if I had the will.'

The girl at his side heard him; the look of fear in her pale face had changed to one of horror.

'I would rather die,' she said, 'than do it.'

To die to some persons is easy, but to perish by devouring flame is appalling to the best and bravest of us. The air in the unventilated passage was by this time almost suffocating, and above the crackle and the roar of the fire rose the eddying smoke and found its way to them. The mass of people in front was moving onward, but almost as imperceptibly as the march of a glacier; it seemed impossible that the last of them—and they two were the very last—could reach the outer air alive.

Suddenly a thought struck Mr. Allerton; there rose up before his inward eye a plan of the hall, as he had seen it before it was built. From one of the two passages opening from the stalls, there was a stone staircase, he remembered, leading under the stage, and at the side of it a door opening into an unfrequented court; his impression was that it was the passage in which they were, but he was not sure. We cry for faith in the fathomless Future, but what would he not have given—about this matter of the Present seemingly so small—for certainty! Should he try that way and be mistaken, they would both without doubt be lost; yet the other way seemed almost devoid of hope. For once the lawyer felt a responsibility that was too great for his own shoulders. Like a rider who has lost his way, and in despair throws his reins upon his horse's neck, he decided to leave the matter to his companion's choice; there was no instinct, indeed, in her case to guide her, but perhaps He, who gives instinct and all other good things to His creatures, might in His mercy give this innocent girl a right judgment. In a few hasty words he therefore put the matter before her.

'If I am wrong, my child,' he added, but the thought, that in that case she would perish and by his own act, was too much for him, and he could not finish the sentence.

'If you are wrong,' she put in, 'you will have done your best for me'—it was not selfishness but her appreciation of the nobility of the other's conduct that forbade her to say 'for us'—'and more than could have been looked for in any stranger. As to my choice in the matter, I say any way but that way,' and she pointed with a shudder to the surging crowd above which her late companion's form could be discovered at some distance battling without scruple, but not without success, for the dear life.

'So be it then,' said Mr. Allerton solemnly; 'this way, my child.' And he took her hand as though she were a child indeed. In turning their back on their fellow-creatures, they did not feel as if they were deserting them, but rather as if they themselves were bidding good-bye to life. If the crowd in fact had turned to the right instead of the left, not one in ten would probably have been then alive, for after about ten feet it terminated in a steep stone staircase down which even those two in the gathering smoke had to feel rather than see their way. They were much nearer to the seat of the fire than they had been before, and the roaring of the flames on the other side of the brick wall that alone intervened between it and them was terrific. The heat, too, was growing almost insupportable. Had the gaslights then gone out, which happened a few minutes afterwards, no human power could have saved them. At the end of the staircase, however, they could see the closed door of which they were in search; their clasped hands clutched one another as they caught sight of it, but neither spoke. The thought which was in the mind of each was, 'Is it locked or unlocked?' There were some tools lying on the floor—a chisel and hammer among them—which, however, there would have been no time to use; perhaps some one had already used them to force the door, or rather it was more likely they had been flung down by the stage workmen who knew this way of egress and had escaped by it. Mr. Allerton turned the handle, and the door yielded to his touch. They were saved.

CHAPTER IX.

REUNITED.

THERE was a wind that night which carried the smoke and flame from the burning hall to the opposite side of it, and left the court in which Mr. Allerton and his young companion now found

themselves canopied by the flying clouds and the quiet stars. As they looked up to them both the old man and the girl said something, though not to each other, and then the girl poured out a few broken words of passionate thanks to her human preserver.

‘Tut, tut, my dear,’ he answered gently, ‘if it had not been for your wise choice and your most admirable behaviour, we should not——’

‘Philippa! let us find dear Philippa and Mr. Roscoe,’ she interrupted excitedly.

‘To be sure,’ he said, putting her arm in his, and hurrying on. He was not very much alarmed on their account as he remembered his last glimpse of them. If any man could make his way to the front, it was, he felt from what he had heard as well as seen of him—it was that man, but the name of course was a revelation to him.

‘Mr. Roscoe is your brother, I suppose,’ he said, conscious of a certain involuntary lessening of interest in his young charge, of which he was nevertheless ashamed.

‘No, no; he is no relation; but he lives at home with us. He is papa’s secretary.’

‘What, is your father Mr. Tremenhere?’

‘Yes, I am his daughter Grace. Is it possible that you know him? How grateful he will be to you! Oh, if Philippa should only be safe! What a dreadful crowd! What a frightful scene!’

As they turned the corner of the court, the spectacle that presented itself was striking indeed. A mass of people, all in black as it seemed, filled every inch of standing ground, and were only kept back from the approaches to the hall by mounted police. Everything above and about them was wet, and shone in the lurid flame that was now leaping up to the skies. The roar of the fire mixed with the mechanical beat of the engines which were playing on it torrents of water in all directions. The conflagration was not kept under, but it was delayed.

‘I feel quite assured, Grace, that your sister and her companion are by this time in safety; but it is impossible that you can either get to them or they to you. I will take you home, where doubtless they will have arrived before us.’

‘But, dear Mr. Allerton, it feels as though we were deserting them.’

It was on the lawyer’s lips to reply that they had not shown

much scruple about deserting *her*, but the thought of the perilous state of the money-lender's health suddenly occurred to him.

'If only for your father's sake, my dear,' he said, 'we ought to go home at once, and break what has happened to him. If the news of the Hall being on fire should reach him by other means, it might have serious consequences.'

'To be sure, it would frighten dear papa very much, would it not?' she assented.

It was clear to her companion that she was unaware of her father's state of health; that it did not enter her mind that it might even frighten him to death.

'Even if Philippa, as you say, has got home,' she continued thoughtfully, 'he will still be in great anxiety upon my account.'

'Indeed I should think he would,' returned the lawyer, 'for he ought to be very fond of you.'

'Oh, but he *is*,' she answered eagerly, 'much fonder of me than I deserve. He calls me his little Fairy.'

'Really?'

The fact itself astonished the lawyer. He could not fancy Josh Tremenhare using a pet name even to his own daughter; but when he coupled it with those remarkable provisions in his will, it seemed amazing in its inconsistency.

'Well, I am sure you are a good fairy,' he answered as lightly as he could. In spite of the presence of mind his companion had shown, far beyond her years, he perceived from her distracted air and the broken tones of her voice, that she was deeply agitated, and that but for her sense of obligation she would probably not have replied to him at all.

As they walked on together homeward, she kept glancing back at the fire, and shook and shuddered at the appalling noise it made. It was with difficulty that they made their way through the crowds that were hurrying to the spectacle. A commissioner of police came galloping down the road, and stopped a mounted patrol coming at full speed from the other direction.

'The people are all out, sir,' they heard the latter say, in reply to some hurried question. 'There have been no lives lost.'

'You hear *that*, my dear,' said the lawyer, comfortingly; and the answering pressure of her hand upon his arm was very welcome to him. The idea he was glad to think had not occurred to her which had occurred to him, that since there were at least two

persons not accounted for whom the patrol knew nothing about, his statement could not be very trustworthy.

They walked on in silence, the girl, though somewhat consoled, still full of fears for her sister, the lawyer reflecting on the strange chance which, despite his resolution to the contrary, was taking him to Lebanon Lodge. If the money-lender could have looked into his mind, he would have been well assured that the man he had made his executor and trustee would take an interest in one at least of his three charges, and would have been duly grateful for it. Strange to say, however, this good will was not reciprocated; for just in proportion to the admiration Mr. Allerton felt for the brave girl beside him, Mr. Allerton despised his client. How a man could possess such a daughter, and even as it would seem to some extent appreciate her, and yet set such a fancy value upon his money, was amazing to him. He had many clients who thought a great deal of their wealth, yet always in connection with its advantage to them or theirs; but Joseph Tremenhere worshipped his wealth itself, as though it were the final good.

There were lights in the drawing-room at Lebanon Lodge, but nowhere else; nor was there any stir about the house, such as there doubtless would have been had their absence excited alarm. It was plain to them that Philippa and her companion had not arrived, and at Mr. Allerton's request Grace said nothing to the servant as to the reason of their delay. Mr. Tremenhere, he informed them, to the lawyer's great relief, had already retired to rest, but Miss Agnes was in the drawing-room. She was of course surprised to see her sister in company with a stranger; but when she heard the cause of it, her agitation and alarm seemed almost to deprive her of her senses.

'The Hall on fire; with Philippa and Edward there! and you left them!' and she threw a look at her sister full of such anger and contempt that poor Grace quailed beneath it.

'On the contrary, madam,' said Mr. Allerton, fired at an accusation so unjust hurled at so innocent an object, 'Mr. Roscoe left *us*. I feel very certain that he has taken good care of himself, and of Miss Philippa likewise.'

'You deserted them. He is lost!' cried Agnes, turning upon the lawyer with angry vehemence; then bursting into tears, she threw herself into a chair and gave vent to a passion of tears.

'At all events, he has not been lost for very long,' observed

Mr. Allerton dryly; he pointed to the window which looked into the little courtyard, where the missing couple could be seen emerging from a hansom.

Agnes leapt to her feet with a little cry of joy; then at once recovered her self-control.

'I am sorry to have spoken as I did, Mr. Allerton,' she exclaimed, 'but I was almost out of my mind upon my sister's account.'

'Your apology is due, madam,' he replied coldly, 'less to me than to your other sister.'

She ran up to Grace and embraced her at once; the best thing she could have done to show her penitence, and one which considerably mollified the lawyer.

'Let them make less noise below, if you please,' he said; 'I happen to know that your father is far from well, and that all excitement has been forbidden to him.'

He spoke with earnestness and with a certain air of command which in a stranger must have seemed to require explanation; but Agnes did not question his authority; she was very willing to conciliate this man, whoever he was, before whom she was conscious she had committed a great imprudence; she thought he was some doctor whom her father had consulted. Even if what he said was true, however, it was just then comparatively of small matter to her; her mind was full of more pressing things. Grace, on the other hand, had run downstairs at once, as much to hush the noise in the hall as to welcome the new-comers.

Philippa embraced her with passionate fervour.

'Thank Heaven, thank Heaven!' she sobbed, as she pressed her to her bosom. An unmistakable touch of remorse mingled with her joyful accents.

'Imagine,' she murmured, 'our horror, when we strained our eyes in vain to see you come out of that horrible place.'

'I told her, however, my dear Grace, that you were in safe guidance,' put in Mr. Roscoe, smiling. 'If I had not been sure of that, we would never have left you.'

'It was all for the best,' said Grace, as he wrung her hand. She knew that her tone was colder than she wished it to be. She was not displeased with him for leaving her, but for the manner of it as regarded others. She still seemed to see him shouldering those poor frightened creatures to left and right; it had been to some degree a revelation to her of his true character.

She could never think of him as being 'nice,' in any sense, again.

His quick intelligence perceived the ground he had lost with her, but not the cause.

'I am afraid, Grace, you feel a grudge against me,' he said plaintively. 'Philippa will tell you that directly I had saved her I tried to go back again for you.'

'He did indeed, Grace,' put in Philippa earnestly, 'only the police would not permit it. How dreadful it was pushing through that shrieking crowd! when they came out it was in great knots and bundles, not like human beings at all; that was why we were unable to recognise you. My dress is torn to pieces, but yours—why you look as if nothing had happened to you!' she added, with amazement.

'Mr. Allerton and I escaped by another way, quite alone.'

'There! I told you how good a guide she had got, Miss Philippa,' exclaimed Mr. Roscoe triumphantly.

'You might have also said how kind a one,' said Grace with tender enthusiasm. 'I owe him more than words can say.'

'I shall certainly write to-morrow to express my deep sense of obligation to him,' observed Mr. Roscoe.

'Mr. Allerton is at this moment in the house,' she answered; 'he saw me home, and naturally waited here for your arrival. Poor Agnes has been in a dreadful state about you both.'

'No doubt,' said Mr. Roscoe, 'but more particularly, of course, upon your sister's account. I think, Miss Philippa, it would be very kind of you to go up to Miss Agnes; she can hardly leave her guest alone.'

Philippa left the room at once—they had been talking in one that led out of the hall—and Grace was about to follow her, when Mr. Roscoe stopped her.

'One moment, dear Miss Grace. Mr. Allerton, I suppose, knows who you all are?'

'Oh, yes; I told him, and, as you are aware, he is an intimate friend of dear papa.'

'I think you are mistaken there. They have had business relations with one another, but that is all.'

'But it is not so; he must be very intimate with him; he told me what alarms and pains me very much, that there is something seriously amiss with papa's health, of which he has never spoken to us.'

'How strange!' Mr. Roscoe's astonishment was perfectly genuine. He knew, of course, of his employer's ailment, but that he should have confided it to Mr. Allerton, of all men in the world, was news indeed—and bad news. His mind leapt at once, if not to the right explanation of the matter, to a suspicion of it. He remembered that on the day after his seizure Mr. Tremenhare had passed the whole morning away from home, on some business of which he had never spoken. Was it possible that he had made his will with the apprehension of what might happen to him any day strong upon him, and had gone to Mr. Allerton for that purpose? The chagrin that Mr. Roscoe's face exhibited as the thought crossed him was beyond even his powers to conceal. Grace naturally took it for sympathetic sorrow.

'Then you, too, were unaware,' she said, 'of anything very wrong with dear papa? A sudden shock, Mr. Allerton said, might be serious to him. Good Heavens! can it be possible that he has heart disease?'

'I have never heard a whisper of such a thing, Miss Grace; but a person has only to be eminent in any walk of life to have all sorts of stories told about him, and Mr. Allerton is in the way of hearing such matters. Did he happen, by the way, when you were alone together, to speak of me?'

'Not a word. We were too much engaged, I fear, with selfish thoughts to talk of anybody.'

She said this with some embarrassment, arising from an unaccustomed sense of duplicity, for she well remembered what they had thought of Mr. Roscoe, though they had not spoken of him.

'I am glad of that,' he answered, smiling. 'Mr. Allerton and I have been antagonists—not personally, of course, but in business matters—and that might have prejudiced him against me. Henceforward, I need hardly say, I can never regard him save with the most heartfelt gratitude. Oh, Grace—for I must call you Grace, if it be but for this once only—never shall I forget the horror of that moment when I was compelled to entrust your precious life to another. It was no question of choice, believe me.'

'How could it have been?' she put in simply. It was evident she had missed his meaning, which had referred to his taking Philippa instead of herself. The innocence of her tone convinced him of the stupendous error that he had been on the point of committing.

'Your generous nature prompts you to say to yourself, "Necessity has no law,"' he continued, 'but I can never forget that in that moment of danger and despair I turned my back upon you.'

'I don't see how you could have done otherwise, Mr. Roscoe,' she replied calmly. She had almost said, 'I don't see, *so far*, how you could have done otherwise.' It was again not the remembrance of his desertion of her at all (which had seemed really a necessity), but that of his behaviour to others, which made her tone so cold. But he had not the key of this, and he felt that his protestations had missed fire.

'I think you should be wishing Mr. Allerton good-bye,' he observed deferentially, with a little sigh.

'True, it is getting late. Let us go very quietly upstairs, so as not to risk waking dear Papa.'

But when she reached the drawing-room she found, to her surprise, that Mr. Roscoe was not following her. She thought it strange, considering what had happened, that he should omit to make his personal acknowledgments to Mr. Allerton; but perhaps his modesty suggested that they should more fitly come from her father.

(To be continued.)

CURIOSITIES OF LEPERDOM.

It is generally held that the surviving Crusaders brought leprosy back to Europe with them from the East; in fact, it used to be bitterly said that that was all they did bring back with them. Another not unlikely source was the early European trade with Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, as suggested by Le Grand d'Aussy in his 'Fabliaux.' The Jesuit Velly, who rarely gave his authorities, says, however, that it was very common in France about the middle of the eighth century under Pepin, and even long before. Voltaire has endorsed this, saying that leper hospitals were already very numerous in Charlemagne's time (768-814). At all events, it is quite clear it was common from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, and that in the twelfth it had become a general plague; every town worth the name then built a special refuge for the lepers, and the number of these *ladrerries* increased enormously. Voltaire, who probably copied from the History of France of another Jesuit (G. Daniel, 1713), in his 'Essai sur les Mœurs,' states that Louis VIII. left 100 sous to each of two thousand of these refuges. Louis VIII. died in 1223, and 100 sous of that day would now be worth about 25*l.* sterling, which would make the whole royal legacy up to the respectable amount of 50,000*l.*

From Father Damien back to St. Louis there has been no lack of devoted charity towards these wretched outcasts. In the Life of the canonised monarch by the confessor of his queen, Marguerite, is an account of his visit to a leprous monk whom he found eating pork, which was then a customary food for lepers. But the King had a pair of fowls and three partridges roasted for the monk, carved a partridge for him, and fed him with it himself, 'putting the morsels into his mouth;' and in those days there were no forks. The disease was by no means confined, as many have thought, to the lowest classes. Robert the Bruce died of it in 1329; and when the Order of the Knights of St. Lazarus was founded for the care of lepers, it was one of its leading rules that its grand-master should always be a leper, so that a supreme fellow-feeling for the stricken should be of the essence of its government. This one fact alone may show us how general leprosy must then have

become. The rule was clearly in operation at least until 1253, when, 'the infidels having slain all the leper-knights of our hospital at Jerusalem,' the Order had to petition Pope Innocent IV. for a dispensation to choose a grand-master who was of sound health. This fact is recited in a Bull of Pius IV. given in the Franciscan Helyot's 'History of Monastic Orders' (i. 263). This Order of St. Lazarus was united to that of St. Maurice in 1572 by Pope Gregory XIII., and the united order took the combined names of both saints, with the new and special obligation of opposing the progress of Protestantism. This was the origin of the Italian decorative order with the same double title, which the Gotha Almanac says, however, was founded by Duke Amadeo VIII. of Sardinia some 140 years earlier (1434). In the Latin will of St. Francis of Assisi—the Seraphic Father Francis, as he was called—he declares his belief that the tenderness he bore the lepers was the sole merit which began to draw down upon him, a sinner, the mercy of God. At the same time he confesses that in his unregenerate state it was all too bitter to him even to look on a leper.

The laws, both civil and ecclesiastical, were nevertheless—for it was a terrible necessity—awful in their severity to the poor lepers. They were not alone cut off from their fellow-men, but, even if only suspected of leprosy, any legal act of theirs became null and void *ipso facto*, unless they made declaration therein of their horrible misfortune. In the old Custom of Normandy a leper (*mezel*), provided that the disease was patent to all, could be heir to none; but he was allowed to hold what he had before he became a leper. The Custom of Beauvoisis laid it down that a leper (*mesiaus*, another form of the word *mezel*) could not be a legal witness, for he was denied conversation and commerce with others (Du Cange and Rochefort). In 1346 an ordinance was made to exclude lepers from the city of London.

As a natural consequence of these disabilities, it was actionable in Aquitaine to call a whole man a leper (*Scaligerana*). Of course his outlawry cut both ways, and the same Custom of Beauvoisis was that if a sound man summoned a leper (*mezel*), the leper could put in the defence that he was outside mundane law; nor was leprosy everywhere a cause of separation between husband and wife; and a leper could marry.

Until they became so feeble as to be driven into a leper-hospital, lepers were, in France at least, hunted from the society of men into wooden huts (*bordes*—our modern word 'boards')

built for them on the great roads. That we were not so civilised in England may be concluded from the repeated mention of 'lepers under the hedges (mesels in hegges)' made in 'Piers the Plowman.' The leper was given a grey cloak, a hat, and a wallet, together with a wooden clapper or a small bell with which he had to warn approaching passengers, so that they should give him a wide berth. A dish, or his hat, placed on the opposite side of the road, invited the compassionate wayfarer to drop an offering. The once well-known French archæologist and man of letters Grosley gave in his 'History of Troyes' the church service for putting a leper out of the world (*hors du siècle*) and into his hut or *borde*; and so 'receiving' him, as postulants are received into religious orders. It is here word for word translated:—

Primo: On the day when they are to be 'received,' the lepers (or *ladres*, as they were then called in France) come to the church and hear mass: which should not be a mass for the dead, as some priests are accustomed to have it.

Item: At this mass the sick man should be apart from the rest of the people, and should have his face covered and tied up as on the day of his death.

Item: At the same mass, the leper is to make an offering and to kiss the priest's foot, and not his hand.

Item: On going out of the church, the priest should have a shovel in his hand, and with this shovel take thrice of the earth of the graveyard, and cast it on the head of the leper, saying: 'My friend, it is in token that thou art dead for the world; and by reason of that, have patience in thyself.'

Item: When he is at the door of his hut, the priest will make him take the oaths and instructions hereinafter given, saying after this manner: 'Friend, thou knowest, and true it is, that the Master of the leper-hospital of Troyes, by his letter presented to me, has denounced thee as a leper, sore-tried and struck with the disease of St. Lazarus; wherefore I forbid thee to trespass or offend in the articles here written.'

Primo: That as long as thou be sick, thou shalt not enter into, nor sleep at night in, any other house than this thy hut; and that thou enter not into any mill.

Item: That thou shalt not look into any well or fountain, and that thou shalt not eat except all alone by thyself.

Item: That thou enter no more upon any process of law.

Item: That thou shalt no more enter a church while service is.

Item: When thou speakest to any one, go under the wind.

Item: When thou meetest any one, go under the wind.

Item: When thou askest an alms, that thou shake thy rattle.

Item: That thou fare not far from thy hut without putting on thy cloak, and that it be of quamelin without any colour.

Item: That thou drink at no other stream than thy own,

Item: That thou have thy well and thy fountain before thy hut, and that thou draw water from none other.

Item: That thou have before thy hut a wooden dish fixed on a pole.

Item: That thou pass nor bridge nor plank without putting on thy gloves.

Item: That thou fare no whither whence thou canst not return to sleep the

night in thy hut, without leave or license from the priest of thy place and the official.

Item : If thou fare far abroad by license, as aforesaid, that thou go not forth without having letters from thy priest and the official.

This sad and solemn service and its oath sufficiently show the outcast, outlawed condition of the European Christian leper of the Middle Ages. The superstition about looking into a well, and so infecting the water by the mere reflection of a leprous form, is curious. The 'quamelin cloak without any colour' was of undyed camelin, a coarse brown, or grey, or nondescript woollen stuff of the period; and as to this cloak it may be noted that the hangman of Douai, or *roi des ribauds*, king of the vagabonds, as he was called, took as his perquisite in 1242 the coat of any leper venturing into the town without permission. The dish at the end of a stick was of course to receive food or money at a respectful distance from the almsgiver. The rule as to gloves discloses the rickety state of the bridges of those days; often a mere half-rotten plank, with or without a rail, which the leper dare not 'touch but a glove,' as the heraldic motto has it about the cat.

Among the ecclesiastical curiosities of leper legislation we should not forget to mention the obscure tests, the segregation, and the strange sacrifices prescribed to him in Leviticus (ch. xiv.). A contemporary deed shows that on June 3, 1422, a curious test was applied to a supposed leper at the little French town of Bourg-St.-Andéol. He was taken to the basin of the public fountain and there bled by two barbers named for the duty. The blood was received into a vessel—presumably a closed vessel—which was put in a bag, and plunged into the water, no doubt to solidify it. The barbers then declared on inspection that the blood was uncorrupted, and the judge pronounced the accused untainted of leprosy. The dignity of barber was then a responsible one. The first general ecclesiastical rule made in favour of lepers is said to have been at the third general Lateran Council in 1179, when it was ordered that wherever they lived in community they might have a church, a priest, and a cemetery to themselves.

From another fact which may be gleaned at Troyes we may conclude how general were the charitable contributions to the support of the lepers. These in time became positive taxes upon trades and corporations. In 1428 the master and governor of the leper-hospital sued the sworn butchers of Troyes for default of their annual gift of twenty-five bacon pigs, and they were ordered,

instead of the contribution in kind, to pay to the hospital in every future year the sum of 12 silver marks in the shape of a dozen cups of fine silver stamped with the Paris hall-mark, gilt and hammered in the best fashion. This was again, later on, commuted for a payment of 200 livres in coin, which were still paid by the corporation of butchers to the general hospital of the town as late as 1760.

This butcher's pork-tribute bears some further comment. Louis IX., as we have seen, found a leprous monk feeding on pork, and the Turks of the Levant to this day say that the Greeks contract leprosy from eating the intolerably bad salt pork of the country. There is no doubt that the disease of pigs which we know as measles was called leprosy, that is, *ladrerie*, in the Middle Ages, and it would seem that there was a belief that it was the same as the human disease, and that it was communicable to man by eating pig's flesh. It was well known that this leprosy or measles could be detected under the pig's tongue, and these two facts would appear to have been the origin of the tongue-inspectors (the *languayeurs*), whose active working before 1375 is proved by an ordinance of the Provost of Paris dated in that year. When leprosy diminished in the human subject the inspection of pork became more lax, as Le Grand d'Aussy testifies in his '*Vie Privée des Français*,' i. 317. Professor Skeat, it is true, maintains that the term '*mesel*' (which we have seen above as *mezel*) for a leper has nothing to do with the word measles; but this leading fact about the pig-disease seems to have escaped him. Du Cange, in his '*Observations on the Life of St. Louis*,' says that *mezeau* (a form of *mesel*) and *ladre* (a lazar, a leper) were synonymous. The assertion that the Low-Latin noun *messellus*, a leper, came from the very classic diminutive adjective *misellus*, wretched, miserable, pitiable, is almost beside the question.

Other trades, as well as the butchers, were laid under contribution for the leper-hospitals, as we may see from the fact that every master baker in Paris had to give a loaf a week to the lazar or leper-hospital outside the city. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the contribution was commuted for a penny a week, which, like Peter's Pence, was called the St. Lazarus or St. Ladré Penny.

Pausanias in his Grecian guide-book records the tradition that the town of Lepreos was built either by a man of the same name, or by his sister Leprea, 'and there are even some who say,' he

continues, 'that its first inhabitants were infected with the leprosy, and from this calamity the city derived its name.' It was, in all probability, a leper town or village, like the leper village—or rather, farm (*chiftlik*)—which we now regulate in Cyprus, having taken it over from the charitable Turks. And, doubtless, the Europeans of the Middle Ages took the practice of segregating the leper, as they did the disease itself, from the Easterns. In the small leper-farm near Nikosia are now isolated some fifty lepers who are, all but one or two Turks, Greek Christians—which fact it is that lends weight to the popular Turkish belief that the lowest Greeks contract leprosy from eating badly-cured pork, which the heat of the climate reduces to a decayed condition. The Turks of course never touch pork. There are always more than twice as many men as women in this Cyprus 'Lepreos,' and they are given bread and money daily to prevent them from begging about the country. Those who still can do so cultivate a small plot of vegetable ground. They have what is called a 'chain of wells,' that is a succession of wells joined by an underground gallery and an aqueduct, all to themselves. One of the rooms is fitted up as a chapel, where some neighbouring village Pappas occasionally officiate. They have also a separate burial-place, and in some years the poor objects die off like flies at the rate of one in five. Two Greek priests from the monastery of Troaditissa have died in this habitation in recent years, and one old woman lived there for half a century, dying in 1884 of old age, rather than of leprosy, so tough was she, at ninety—a mere trunk, handless, footless, and otherwise a terrible spectacle. Although half a score cases are interned yearly in Cyprus, the disease is now not thought to be spreading in the island, especially since we have forbidden lepers to land there from the Asian continent and isolated all that could be laid hands on.

The liberalities and concessions of kings and of their great lords and vassals and the charities of towns and people, combined with the gradual diminution of leprosy itself, ended by enormously enriching the leper communities. Abuses of course crept in, and the leper's fate at length became an object of envy rather than of pity to the poor cross-harrowed serf and to greater than he also. The natural result of oppression, outlawry, and the savage enforcement of the extreme of disability, was to make the lepers of the Middle Ages a class apart, like the Jews or the Cagots,

with whom they even came to be confounded. Accusations of the most horrible crimes and depravity grew rabid and frequent, and they culminated at length in the well-known grotesque charge, in which the lepers were coupled with the Jews, of an astounding and, to us, almost inconceivable plot to communicate their malady to the whole population by poisoning all the springs, wells, and rivers with their own blood. John of Leyden in the '*Chronicon Belgicum*' tells, perhaps, a good deal more than the whole truth when he says that in 1309 'all the lepers in universal Christendom' were burnt on this account. But 1321 seems to have been the true date of this leper-panic in France. A leper was arrested, so one story goes, on the territory of the Lord of Parthenay, in Poitou, and on him was found (as it very naturally might have been) a packet containing strange substances. He was questioned ('question' then, of course, also meant torture), and the following confession was extracted. The Jews, who thirsted for revenge, after their harrying by the Pastoureaux of 1320, had leagued themselves with the lepers, and were encouraged and sustained by the Saracens and by the Moorish kings of Tunis and Granada, in a vast plot to exterminate all the Christians and to divide the realm afterwards among themselves. For this purpose, knowing well that they could not infect running water, they were to poison all the wells and fountains with, according to some, lepers' blood and two or three herbs whose names were unknown; or, according to others, with adders' heads, toads' paws, and women's hair. Another account says that in 1320 and 1321, in many places and notably in Languedoc, the people detected at the bottoms of wells and in fountains small packets of unknown substances tied to a stone to sink them. These absurd discoveries were attended by grave epidemics, and, by the confession of the wretched beings who were accused, it was discovered that the accursed little bundles contained poisonous juices, leprous stuff, the blood and slime of reptiles, and some other matters which they could not put a name to—poor wretches! and the whole was 'complicated with some horrible profanation.' If this hellish manœuvre did not kill outright, it would infect every soul alive with leprosy. But, as the anonymous chronicler of Tours naïvely says, 'by the Divine grace, no Christian, by drinking of the waters, suffered death or any evil,' and the unfortunate and only victims of this preposterous and incredible plot were the innocent and unconscious plotters themselves. In Touraine,

Poitou, and Guyenne, they were cruelly punished. At Rabelais's Chinon, as it afterwards was, 160 were burnt in one day; and in Périgord and Languedoc, in the midst of a plague-panic, fires were lighted everywhere, and the lepers and Jews heaped thereon. Such are the accounts given by the chroniclers. On June 11, 1321, all the Jews of Tours were arrested, and a few days later the Parliament of Paris, at the dictate of Philip V., condemned the Jews of France to forfeit 150,000 livres, or about half a million sterling of to-day. The Jews were banished bodily from France on St. John's Day, 1322. A similar panic seems to have broken out at Chartres in the reign of Charles VI.; and there can now be little doubt that the King and his councillors lent themselves to the popular fury, and even helped to foment it, by such matters as the letter (still extant, and of course fabricated) from the King of Granada, the object being to seize the property of both Jews and lepers. The former went into the royal coffers, and some, at least, of the leper revenues went to the Knights Hospitallers of St. John and of St. Lazarus, and eventually these latter revenues commonly merged in those of the general hospitals which sprang out of the exclusively leper institutions.

It has already been stated that the lepers were confounded with the outcast and very mysterious Cagots in the middle of the fifteenth century. An ordinance of Louis XI. in 1439 speaks of 'the malady of leprosy and cagotry' at Toulouse. This disease, also known as *cagoutille*, was marked by pallor, faded eyes, the vanishing of the ear-lobes, insensible patches on the body, credulously said to be devil-marks, and an eruption called *mezellerie*, the term also used for true leprosy. The Cagots were also said to have been sometimes mad or idiotic. Their maladies or their selves are said to have infested Western France from north to south, and to have prevailed remarkably in the diocese of St. Malo. They had a separate door and passage into the churches, a separate font of blessed water, and they were buried apart. They were also exempt from taxes and military service. One modern conjecture is that they were Pyrenean cretins. The late Francisque Michel's history of accursed races, which gave Victor Hugo his phenomenal tales about the kidnappers in 'L'Homme qui Rit,' contains a lot of apocryphal and utterly uncritical matter about them: for instance, that they were Goths and Arabs who took refuge under the last of the Merovingians at the foot of the Pyrenees, and were called *canes Gothi*, dogs of Goths, by the people; whence, obviously,

cagot! Michel, however, may have taken this last from Joseph Scaliger, to whom is ascribed the laconic statement, '*canis Gottus, cagoth*;' and Michel, in any case, as was his wont, contradicts himself flatly in his Slang Dictionary where he says *Cagot* (from which he brings *cagou*, a solitary thief, a sort of rogue-elephant) among the robbers was the name given to a race of people reputed to be diseased, and therefore kept in everlasting quarantine. Rochefort says the Moors who remained in Gascony were called *Cagots* in the time of Charles Martel, and that the term was applied to the despised and detested inhabitants of Béarn. They have also, it would seem quite gratuitously, been given a Gnostic origin; partly indeed on the ground that in their supplication (which, of course, was composed for them) to Pope Leo X., in 1514, for restitution to civil rights as being then perfectly healthy, they are made to say that their ancestors passed for having embraced the party of the Albigenes.

There is just this possible explanation of many of these apparent contradictions, and that is that the remnants of conquered outcast tribes, like the *gauds* and the *bagauds* of the Middle-Age forests, have in all times and lands, whether in flight or in hiding, herded together in remote inaccessible spots, and that they have been joined and recruited from time to time, not alone by the scared victims who escaped the persecutions of the general community, but also by waifs and strays from the criminal and diseased classes. The general term *Cagot* may very well have a regular descent from *κακός*, bad, the crude form of which, as *caco-*, was so extremely hardworked as a depreciative prefix. The word *κακός* itself also did duty in a great number of analogous senses, such as 'bad, evil, wicked, vicious; cowardly, depraved, idle, unfortunate, unlucky, pernicious; poor, mean, low, base, vile, ugly, and fearful.' *Cacou* is an injurious word in Brittany, and the Bretons called the *Cagots* *cacous* and *cacouas*. They also seem to have been called *agots*; and *agotum* was the Low-Latin for a sewer. Other terms for them were *cahets*, *gahets*, *capots*, *gavos*, and *gaffots*. In Brittany they seem to have called themselves *cousins*; but that was a common term of companionship among both the dangerous and the safer classes: witness its survival in the comical 'right trusty and well-beloved cousin and counsellor' of our royal documents, and in the verb 'to cozen,' that is, to call 'coz,' to flatter, to beguile, to cheat. It is also said, somewhat confusedly, that they called themselves Christians;

but this and, in part, their confusion with the Gnostics may have arisen from their taking the name of *crestias* or *cristias* in the South. The Gnostics of the early centuries dubbed themselves *chrestiani* (from *χρηστός*), good, worthy, excellent people. The Cathares (*καθαρός*, pure) who appeared in Brabant in 1411 as 'a society of intelligent or illuminated men,' were said to be a survival of Gnosticism, and the monk Regnier, who had belonged to the sect, said they called each other *chrestians*. The marking of the Cagots is also very curious. In 1396 at Marmande they were obliged to sew on their garments a patch of red stuff in the shape of a duck's foot, or *pied de gait*; in 1460 the States of Béarn asked that the Cagots should be obliged to wear the *goose-foot*—it is odd that in the Bayonnais *gait*, *guite*, drake, duck, we have the same vowel-sound as in geese—as in past times; and at Bordeaux death was the punishment of a *gahet* or Cagot who did not wear the piece of red cloth.

This digression about the Cagots was brought in by their confusion with the lepers; but when the leper was called a Cagot it must have been by an application of that word as a general term of contempt; for there is no instance traced of the reverse—of the Cagots themselves being distinctly called lepers.

This budget of curiosities may fitly close with the etymology of the several terms for a leper. The most general term in old French was *ladre*, and the disease and the hospital were both called *ladrerie* or *maladrerie*. *Ladre* was the vulgar form of the Lazarus of the parable, who of course also gave his name to the Italian *lazaroni*. The Low-Latin *lazarus* also meant a leper, and gave the word *lazaretto*, a leper-hospital, which now survives as a quarantine building. These hospitals were also called *leproseries*, a word which, as well as our leper, comes from the Greek *λέπρα*.

THE DUDDON VALE AS IT IS AND IS TO BE.

It was a mere coincidence, but the day and the hour which favoured the Prophet of Brantwood thirteen years ago, favoured the humblest of his disciples as he looked down over the levels of Thurston-mere, and thought of the kingly days of the Norsemen, when here, at the King's Town—Coniston—the Thunderer was enthroned.

'Yesterday, an entirely perfect summer light on the "Old Man;" Lancaster Bay all clear, Ingleborough and the great Pennine Fault as on a map. Divine beauty of western colour on thyme and rose—then twilight of clearest warm amber far into the night, of pale amber all night long, hills dark clear against it.'

So wrote John Ruskin of June 26, 1876, and so I, who was reading by twilight till eleven o'clock of the evening, can aver of June 26, 1889. Yet I arose a saddened man next morn, with something of the sadness of him who penned that pathetic passage, 'As I write morning breaks over the Coniston Fells,' for it had been my lot to visit the Duddon Vale, to leave the town of Thor for the Thunderer's dale, and to find that the Vulcan of our nineteenth century had entered the valley, and had determined to dispossess the inhabitants, the cattle, the wild flowers, and the woodland of whatever sweetness of refreshing stream, or strength of invigorating sound, the thunder-clouds on Walney Scar or Wetherlam of old had sent from heaven. In other words, I had seen the very spot at which, by Bills already before Parliament—nay, already in Committee—a great Steel-works company and the Corporation of an iron-manufacturing town intend to drink the Duddon dry, and leave the dale disconsolate.

The reader may well open his eyes. Bills before Parliament for draining a whole river-bed dry, and such a river! no compensation reservoirs or anything of the kind provided—impossible! Was the like ever heard of before?

What about the cattle and the green herb for the service of man? What about the woodlands, cheated of the vapour that imperceptibly rises as the stream passes to the sea? What about the houses that now, or in time to come, may be found upon the banks of their river?

What about the fish, that heretofore have passed to and fro from pool to pool? The food supply, as well as the sport of such a river as the river Duddon, when the 'Sea-coast Fishery Conservancy' becomes a fact, must be considerable.

As for the former matter, it is little use asking the Duddoner proper. He had 'niver thowt on aboot sec like things;' he supposed 'they was terrible girt men, wi' Lord Hartington amang 'em, as wantid watter, and it was a Parl'ment job, and nowt wad dae but watter mud gang,' at least he supposed 'sea.'

As for the latter, the Government Inspector of Fisheries, Mr. Berrington, must answer; he has lately returned from a visit to the Duddon Valley, and will have formed his own opinions.

But we felt there were considerations other than those of mere utility of water to the animal and plant life upon the banks and in the river, and we expect all Englishmen who have ever visited Duddon, with Wordsworth as their guide, will feel so too.

'It is a river—this Duddon river—which for beauty may be compared to any river, of equal length of course, in any country.' So says Wordsworth, and Wordsworth knew the Duddon well. As a little lad he had gone thither from Hawkshead to ply the rod, and indulge his love of angling he had learned in the Derwent. As a grown man, he on several occasions resided for a time at Broughton, the village near the estuary.

'Little did he then think,' the old poet tells us—the young, over-tired lad of that remarkable day of much walking, torrents of rain, and no fish—'that it would be his lot to celebrate in a strain of love and admiration the stream which, for many years, he never thought of without recollections of disappointment and distress;' but it was providential that Wordsworth had a near relative who welcomed him into the neighbourhood of the Duddon, just at the time in his life when the poet's heart felt most surely that

From nature and her overflowing soul
He had received so much that all his thoughts
Were steeped in feeling.

Speaking of the Broughton visit, 'I passed,' says Wordsworth, 'many delightful hours upon the banks of this river.' The remembrances of that period are the subject of Sonnet XXI. :—

Whence that low voice—a whisper from the heart
That told of days long past, when here I roved
With friends and kindred tenderly beloved.

But there was another remarkable occasion when Wordsworth passed through the Duddon Valley. In August 1811 he travelled across country with his household from the Grasmere vicarage to Bootle. Delicate little Catherine and Thomas needed sea air. They journeyed, as he tells us in his Epistle to Sir George Beaumont,

Up many a sharply turning road, and down.

I suspect they passed over no more wild road with lovelier prospect of a border vale than the road that, winding down from Walney Scar, gave them fair prospect of Seathwaite, Wallabarrow, and far Donnerdale. Over no valley did they cast a backward view more longingly upon their 'gipsy travel' than over the valley so soon to be bereft of its chiefest charm at its most charming part, the vale of the Duddon below Birker Moor, between Ulpha Kirk and Duddon Hall.

'I have many affecting remembrances connected with this stream—especially things that occurred on its banks during the later part of that visit to the seaside, of which the former part is detailed in my Epistle to Sir George Beaumont.'

Wordsworth must have remembered, amongst other things, how those beloved children, so soon to be removed—they died in the following year—played on Duddon banks, and have linked indissolubly with that Duddon stream the vision of that

Being, breathing thoughtful breath,
That traveller between life and death,

with whom he shared the Duddon journey.

I thought of thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away—vain sympathies
For backward Duddon! as I cast my eyes
I see what was, and is, and will abide.
Still glides the stream, and shall for ever glide!
The Form remains, the function never dies!

Ah! how little could the poet, as he gazed back in thought to such scenes as he remembered of Duddon, rolling seaward from the wooded cleft of Duddon Hall and widening and brightening to the sands below the Broughton meads, have imagined that a time would come so swiftly when Parliament would be asked by a Limited Liability Company and a Municipal Corporation to sanction the death of Duddon, to alter its form, to obliterate its functions, to rob its voice of sound, to fill its mouth with sand, and to prevent the river of ten thousand years from gliding any more! But it is a good thing that the Duddon has found a poet to care for it.

Most Englishmen would rise from their graves if they heard that the waters the Swan of Avon knew were to be utterly cut off, and Shakespeare's home was no more to know the joy of its willow brooks.

We expect that in a minor way most lovers of Wordsworth and believers in the enriching of our literature at his hand will start from their sleep when they realise that six miles at its loveliest of the loveliest of Lancashire and Cumberland rivers is in jeopardy, at the mercy of a handful of committee men at Westminster.

We are not amongst those who deny that manufacturing towns must have supply of water pure and sweet. We congratulate Manchester on her efforts to obtain such from the English lakes, though we believe that she might have found water nearer home.

But we remember that Manchester was forced to come so far afield as eighty miles, because it was demanded that large compensation stores must be made for every stream among the hills she wished to drink from; and we know that she was not permitted to make arrangements for lifting the cup of Thirlmere's waters crystal clear to the lips of her multitudes, till she had given guarantee that so much water as now passes down the river Bure to Keswick and the sea should still flow down the vale of St. John's, for the service of beast and man.

But here in the case of Barrow, with its powers obtained in Parliament of procuring water from the high ground between itself and Ulverston still unexhausted, with its feet standing upon a natural water-bed, from which by artesian wells or otherwise any amount of water for industrial use, as long as the sea remains, can be lifted; with the Cumberland mountains close by, and the Furness Fells with their great rainfall as neighbours, with natural reservoirs in the hills formed by tarns sprinkled throughout the uplands within easy reach of the town—what possible excuse could there be for such audacious proposals as now, in the names of the Barrow Hæmatite Steel Company Limited, and the Barrow-in-Furness Corporation, have obtained second reading and await the committee's decision?

Let us, to realise these proposals, which really mean the drinking dry of Duddon, visit the vale. We can go thither with many guides. We may take Wordsworth's 'Sonnets,' and puzzle over the localities which inspired them; may wonder of which

of the fair scenes of 'water-teeth' or stepping-stones the poet wrote:—

Here the child
Puts, when the high-swoll'n flood runs fierce and wild,
His budding courage to the proof;

whether the necklace of stones upon the bosom of the stream be at Seathwaite or nearer Cockley Beck matters little; may search out the Faëry Chasm and its elfin stage of boulder rock for fairy revels at Birk's Brig or lower down the stream; may wonder how the poet's mind could transform the old legend of the lady who perished by the wolf in the 'dub' or pool by Duddon Hall into the tradition of Sonnet XXII. But he will find no more accurate guide to the characteristic beauty of the Duddon than the poet.

From the birthplace of the cradled nursling as seen from Wraynose, or the glistening, snake-like, loosely scattered chain of its coil as viewed from

The lone camp on Hard Knot's height,
Whose guardians bent the knee to Jove and Mars,

right down to the

Fields, with dwellings sprinkled o'er,
And one small hamlet under a green hill;

on by the high ground of the Pen, whence men see 'the stationary spots of sunshine upon Birker Moor that the upland tillage of the farms has given,' or beyond the Wallabarrow chasms, where some awful spirit has impelled the stream to leave,

Utterly to desert the haunts of men;

right on to where

The Kirk of Ulpha, to the pilgrim's eye
Is welcome as a star;

or to where

Not hurled precipitous from steep to steep,
Lingering no more mid flower-enamelled lands
And blooming thickets, nor by rocky bands
Held; but in radiant progress toward the deep,
Where mightiest rivers into powerless sleep
Sink, and forget their nature, *now* expands
Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands
Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!

If one wanted eyes to see the moods of this *blue* stream, one would borrow the poet's. One can never forget that other poets have seen Duddon and been impressed. Father Faber, from the skirts of that awful hill Blackcombe, where his Sir Lancelot found

hermitage, had often wandered up the Duddon vale, and had heard,

how From hanging wood and lawny mountain-side,

The foamy Duddon forced its clamorous way
Amid the opposing straits of rock, or brawled
With pebbly sound across the shingle blue,
Which in the morning sun had glanced like beds
Of diamond or topaz ;

had listened in the twilight as he wandered by the lower reaches of the Duddon, when,

Along the uneven edges of the hills
The gradual muster of the stars begin,
While the green groves turn glossy and obscure,

to the music of the river chiming beneath the trees of Duddon Hall, and he had written :—

Firmer, and yet more hollow grows the voice
Of ancient Duddon, and more palpable
The tingling of the woodlands as the night
Advances her engrossing silence there.

But Father Faber had never thought of the night-time of a money-blinded people, who would sit in the darkness of their own forge chimneys, and silence for ever the clamorous brawl or hollow murmur of such an enchanting stream as Duddon surely is, for men that have ears to hear its mountain song.

If one wanted prose guides to the Duddon Vale, let him take of modern writers Mrs. Lynn Linton's 'Lake Country.' Mrs. Lynn Linton without the sneer is delightful reading, and though she is no Wordsworthian, and does not believe in 'Wonderful Walker,' the Duddon priest—or rather priest, schoolmaster, lawyer, weaver, shepherd, clogger in one—she has an eye to see and a heart to feel, and it is plain that for her the Duddon river is a human thing, to be walked with, and talked with, and thought with as a friend.

Of earlier guides let us turn to old Green. He is generally accurate, and though he would probably have got very little change out of the dalesmen to whom he wished good-morrow, and did probably see of 'milkmaids few or none,' he realised the primal calm of the 'unvitiated region' which he described, and felt that the peculiar tranquillity of the dale had laid its spell upon him. He writes thus of the Duddon Valley:—

'After all, the traveller would be most gratified who should

approach this beautiful stream, neither at its source, as is done in the sonnets, nor from its termination, but from Coniston over Walna Scar, first descending into a little circular valley, a collateral compartment of the long winding vale through which flows the Duddon.

‘This recess, towards the close of September, when the after-grass of the meadows is still of a fresh green, with the leaves of many of the trees faded, but perhaps none fallen, is truly enchanting.

‘At a point elevated enough to show the various objects in the valley, and not so high as to diminish their importance, the stranger will instinctively halt. On the foreground, a little below the most favourable station, a rude footbridge is thrown over the bed of the noisy brook foaming by the wayside. Russet and craggy hills of bold and varied outline surround the level valley, which is besprinkled with grey rocks plumed with birch trees. A few homesteads are interspersed, in some places peeping out from among the rocks like hermitages whose site has been chosen for the benefit of sunshine as well as shelter; in other instances the dwelling-house, barn, and byre compose together a cruciform structure, which, with its embowering trees, and the ivy clothing part of the walls and roof like a fleece, call to mind the remains of an ancient abbey. Time, in most cases, and nature everywhere, have given a sanctity to the humble works of man that are scattered over this peaceful retirement. Hence a harmony of tone and colour, a perfection and consummation of beauty which would have been marred had aim or purpose interfered with the course of convenience, utility, or necessity.

‘This unvisited region stands in no need of the veil of twilight to soften or disguise its features. As it glistens in the morning sunshine it would fill the spectator’s heart with gladness.

‘Looking from one chosen station he would feel an impatience to rove among its pathways, to be greeted by the milkmaid, to wander from house to house, exchanging “good-morrows” as he passes the open doors; but at evening, when the sun is set, and a pearly light gleams from the western quarter of the sky, with an answering light from the smooth surface of the meadows—when the trees are dusky, but each kind still distinguishable—when the cool air has condensed the blue smoke rising from the cottage chimneys—when the dark mossy stones seem to sleep in the bed of the foaming brook; then he would be unwilling to move for-

ward, not less from a reluctance to relinquish what he beholds, than from an apprehension of disturbing by his approach the quietness beneath him.

'Issuing from the plain of this valley, the brook descends in a rapid torrent, passing by the churchyard of Seathwaite. The traveller is thus conducted at once into the midst of a wild and beautiful scenery, which gave occasion to the sonnets from the fourteenth to the twentieth inclusive. From the point where the Seathwaite brook joins the Duddon is a view upwards into the pass through which the river makes its way into the plain of Donnerdale. The perpendicular rock on the right bears the ancient British name of *The Pen*; the one opposite is called *Wallabarrow Cragg*, a name that occurs in several places to designate rocks of the same character. The chaotic aspect of the scene is well marked by the expression of a stranger who strolled out while dinner was preparing, and at his return, being asked by his host "what way he had been wandering," replied, "As far as it is finished!"'

The charm of the Duddon Valley is what it ever has been—its absolute freedom from nineteenth-century change and restlessness. If the old Britons from *Barnscar*, or the *Torver dykes*, came back to-day, or the Romans looked out from *Hardknott Camp*, they would know their valley solitude; they would find the river they drank of, as much to-day as in their own time, a

Child of the clouds, remote from every taunt, of sordid industry.

If men of later times arose from their graves, they would find the vale more tranquil than even in their years; for the mule bells used to jangle down from *Birker Moor* by the old '*Spital*' above *Ulpha*, and the packhorses crossed by *Hardknott* and *Wrynose*, or toiled up *Walney Scar* for *Seathwaite*.

It is no little thing that there should be left to England one twelve-mile length of stream, and one small vale of pastoral Paradise, where still it would be possible to find a peasantry unspoiled by contact with a city's vice, and for its clergy, too, a possibility of

Such priest as Chaucer sang in fervent lays,
Such as the Heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew,
And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise.

One does not mean that one could still hope, as one entered the lowly parsonage at *Seathwaite*, to see, as was seen by a passing traveller in 1754, the parish clergyman 'sitting at the head of a long square table, such as is commonly used in their country by the lower class of people, dressed in a coarse blue frock trimmed with

black horn buttons, a checked shirt, a leathern strap about his neck for a stock, a coarse apron, and a pair of great wooden-soled shoes plated with iron to preserve them (what we call clogs in these parts), with a child upon his knee, eating breakfast: his wife and the remainder of the children were some of them employed in waiting on each other, the rest in teasing and spinning wool, at which trade he is a great proficient, and, moreover, when it is made ready for sale, will lay it by sixteen or thirty-two pounds' weight upon his back, and on foot seven or eight miles will carry it to market, even in the depth of winter.' No! The Wonderful Walker, after his ninety-three summers, lies beneath an 'unelaborate stone' close by the sun-dial in the little church hard by, with the date June 22, 1802, and his partner who helped him to bring up his twelve children, and to teach the village school and brew the home-brewed ale for the village, and keep the porridge-bowl full for the church-comers' Sunday meal, rests beside him. But the Duddon Vale produced that wonderful man with his genial good sense, his

Charity, in deed and thought;

his

Resolution competent to take
Out of the bosom of simplicity
All that her holy customs recommend,
And the best ages of the world prescribe.

And such a scene for pastoral labour may still give us its natural products—just such heroically simple characters.

I dare say if an undergraduate wrote a note to the landlord of the little inn at Ulpha, in Latin, to-day, he would be astonished to have an answer in Greek, but this really happened within historic time, when Gunson was landlord of the Ulpha house of call; and so whilst Duddon had its simple priests, it reared its scholarly yeomen to keep its public-houses, and these withal taught at its village schools such common sense, such unaffected ways to its children, that when in hard times a 'vara heigh larned' lady, who had married a yeoman farmer in Donnerdale, exclaimed, 'Well, she for her part should be contented if she could only obtain food and raiment,' her husband rebuked her for her affectation thus: 'Thee fule,' said he, 'thoo doesn't think thoos to hev mair than other fwoak. I'se content wi meat and cleas!' (clothes).

It is as nurse of character unspoiled that Duddon Vale as it is

is to be held in honour. Duddon without its river would no longer be the Duddon beloved of old. It was a glorious day when, taking train at Coniston, we sped along through the thickets to Torver and Woodlands. The quaint old Coniston Hall of the Flemings, with its Flemish chimneys, square halfway up and round the other, was beneath us. On our left, away across Coniston Lake, shone out Brantwood; Torver, with its church ale-house close to its church, first Protestant church in Roman Catholic Furness—nay, in all England, so say the Torver people, who boast that Archbishop Cranmer consecrated it—is passed. The pines and broken ground of Woodlands are forgotten in the glorious light upon the sands that shine beyond Broughton to the west and south—there where Duddon broadens into radiance and, taking light for sound, ceases her song.

We left the train. Thence up by Broughton Tower, with its memories of how the Duchess of Burgundy could win an ancient family to forsake their king, and for a pretender, Lambert Simnel, dare to make common cause with the invaders at 'Fudra's Pele,' and, in 1487, march to a disastrous defeat at Stoke, near Coventry.

Thence downhill we went. The valley of the Lickle, fair and fresh and green right up to Walney Scar, lay on our right. We crossed its pastoral pleasantness of breezy meadow and gained the Duddon Bridge.

Right opposite were the woods the Lords of Mellom hunted the wild boar in, the woods through which the De Boyvilles and the Huddlestons—who dealt out feudal justice at the gibbet on yonder sands for generations—followed the deer. Hid in these woods are ashes of the furnace which was the father of all the blast stithies in this iron land of the smith and bellows.

The old wind-bag that was water-driven, was heard of within memory. We are a new people in this north-western border of the possessions of the Furness monks of old.

Now up the narrow lane we go, embowered by and showered upon by wild dog-roses. The cottages at Bank End are wreathed in flowers. On we go by Row Bank. The shepherds are busy beneath the honeydew-leaved sycamores, clipping their sheep. The lambs are bleating piteously for their mothers, so suddenly made strange to them.

The foxgloves shine,
The elder-flowers are sweet.

On our right is seen the pathway the Ulpha priest with his

own hands wrought up by the side of the ghyll to take him over to Torver and Donnerdale, as he passed to his far-scattered chapels among the hills to the east. On our left stands, in its hollow woodland, Duddon Hall—so famous until late for its wonderful Romney portraits. The Duddon scarcely sounds in our ears. It is a white, almost dry, torrent bed at places, notwithstanding that the Logan beck sends down its tribute from the west, and on beyond us Crosby Ghyll adds its blessing. But what beauty there is in the clear pools and network of water that show the blue-grey volcanic ash of the Duddon bed through its blue-grey waters! Let the thunder-shower break on Donnerdale and on yonder Birker Moor, and the Duddon would be a torrent. We cross the bridge beyond the common, we go over Holehouse Beck; we swerve aside, go off the main road, and find ourselves at the 'Travellers' Rest.' We pause to wonder at the luxury of the saxifrages, the violas, the varied ranunculi. We drink our milk, and get our guide to the scene of disastrous work that Barrow is contemplating.

Upon our left lifts up the dark ruinous-looking, majestic castle-form that once gave shelter for the night to travellers bound for Bootle over Birker Moor. That house, high-lifted o'er the vale, was in Wordsworth's mind when he wrote Sonnet XXVII., as surely as was the 'embattled' house in midst of Rydal Vale.

Soon a ghyll is crossed—Crosby Ghyll—

Hurrying with lordly Duddon to unite.
And seldom hath ear listened to a tune
More willing than the busy hum of noon
Sworn by that voice.

We had better listen well and long. The Barrow Hæmatite Steel Works Company Limited have in their Bill before Committee determined not only to throw a dam across the Duddon at a point close by, but have also decided to throw a dam across Crosby Ghyll, at a point in this fair wood called Calf-How Wood.

They are in earnest. They want four million gallons of water per day. They could not arrange to get it on terms that suited them from the Corporation reservoir. They will get Crosby Ghyll to their need, and by damming up Duddon close by they will drink Duddon dry also.

They are even less compassionate upon the dwellers by Duddon banks than the Barrow Corporation. At least, the Barrow Waterworks Company will allow Crosby Ghyll to go rejoicing, even if bereft of its old companion the Duddon, to the sea.

Now we pass on by Ulpha Kirk, not without thought of the blind priest who of olden time would ask: 'Wha's coming now? Is John coming—walking or riding?' and settle the time of service accordingly. But we had best enter the churchyard. Thence we may see the scene of Barrow's contemplated water-drinking extraordinary.

In yonder field, known as Langelt Holme Field, where the vale broadens out to pastoral richness and a fair pretence at broad acedom, there is to be the settling pool or store reservoir to allow Duddon to think a little in quiet before it passes into reservoir pipes and be no more seen. Across that river-bed close by is to-day an anticipatory dam for water-gauge. Go up to it, and you will find two and a half inches of water flowing over a dam twelve feet wide. This is all the water that Duddon in this dry Junetide can yield from all its upper reaches. Every drop of this is to be drained off into the pool, and thence to pass underground to Barrow.

One enters the churchyard. The church shines no longer out against the darkened Ulpha Moor in that whitewashed simplicity which made it in Wordsworth's days seem,

To the pilgrim's eye,
As welcome as a star that doth present
Its shining forehead through the peaceful rent
Of a black cloud.

But there is the same tranquillity about the spot where—who knows?—may rest the bones of Ulf, the son of Evard, the father of Ketell, and where his posterity and retainers down till the time of Henry III. may have found sepulture. Still one can feel the peace of that old mid-valley moraine, wherein the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep as the lych gate clinks behind one. Peace? yes; for right in front of us, as we gaze across the river to the eastern hillside slope, is still seen the deserted garden ground that marks the spot where, in Fox's time, the folk 'of the poke bonnet and the ample brim' met within their simply walled and rustic-seated enclosure to wait upon the Spirit.

There is scarcely any site more touching in the Duddon Vale than that hillside meeting-place and burial-place of the people called in derision 'Quakers,' known to-day as 'The Sepulchre;' and here, as one stands in Ulpha Kirkyard and gazes across the river to the resting-place of those champions for peace, one may well feel that they and we, though we are on different sides of the

great river, are blessed in the full peacefulness of the surroundings.

Peace breathes from far Scawfell and shadowy Wetherlam ;
from Harter Fell and Birker Moor ; from Walney Scar and Torver
Fell, Caw, and Wallabarrow.

Peace on the hills, and in the valley peace !
Peace on the moor, and in the meadows peace !

And one finds oneself repeating the closing lines of Wordsworth's
sonnet written at the spot :—

How sweet were leisure could it yield no more
Than mid that wave-washed churchyard to recline,
From pastoral graves extracting thoughts divine ;
Or there to pace and mark the summits hoar
Of distant moonlit mountains faintly shine,
Soothed by the unseen river's gentle roar.

The Barrow Corporation has determined that charm shall be broken, that the river shall no longer sound of peace. A dam is to be built right across the river-bed in the meadow just up yonder, and, subject to the powers of their Act, they are 'to take, use, get, and appropriate such of the waters of the river Duddon and the tributaries thereof as can or may be intercepted and impounded by the Waterworks by the Act authorised.' Not a drop of water, for all their settling bed and storage reservoir in Langelt Holme Field, is to be returned to the thirsty river-bed, and this notwithstanding that high up in the hills Nature in the Seathwaite and Devote Tarns has provided ample reservoirs for Barrow and its Steelworks into the bargain, and that Coniston Lake, Esthwaite, and Windermere are well within reach.

PATIENCE.

CHAPTER I.

SHE was the plainest—one might almost say ugliest—of the entire cargo; and there were seventeen of them. Poor Patience Owen! The cargo consisted of real live English women, sent out to become the wives of the bachelor missionaries of Shikarore. The 'Trincomalee' had brought them out from Liverpool, and they were now coming into harbour at Khansal, chaperoned by the wife of a leading minister who was coming out to rejoin her husband, and all agog to espy the first aspirants to their hands. The principle upon which the brotherhood acted on these occasions was that of 'first come first served,' and, lest some ill-favoured maiden should be palmed off upon them through the carelessness of a proxy, a good number of the missionaries had managed to get away from the scene of their labours so as to personally select upon their arrival at Khansal the future partners of their joys and sorrows. If once a young woman had been told off to an absentee, and a suitable escort found for her to the gentleman's neighbourhood, objections were useless, and the very next day she would be married to him from her escort's house.

Speculations, conjectures, even dreams, had formed the staple of the young ladies' conversation on the voyage out: needless to say whither they tended. Were not the seventeen coming out *to be married*? What harm then to give the reins to imagination and tongue on the subject of their *futures*? The prettiest aimed high, for of course on so sketchy an acquaintance the charms of the outer woman would principally attract the suitors, and the most engaging in appearance would be the first chosen; though indeed the passing triumph thus obtained might well be neutralised by the possible undesirability of the 'first come.' If a hard-featured and elderly person be ever so capable a housewife, and a noted teacher of Sunday schools be afflicted with a cast in her eye and a bad complexion, men (and missionaries are also men) will fail in properly appreciating their good qualities; weakly preferring some better favoured sister, ignorant, perchance, of the best recipe for strawberry jam—not after all of

overwhelming importance in the East—or the names of the kings of Israel and Judah. But Patience! She was small, and a little bit lame. Her poor little face had a pinched and half-starved look; her little grey linen dress was skimpily made; her hair was turning grey although she was only twenty-five; and, from having always been the butt and fetish of her own family, she had grown stupidly awkward, apt to blush and to knock things over in her nervousness, afraid to say what came into her head lest she should be laughed at, and therefore remaining silent, shy, and apparently dull. *She* was far too much afraid of the children to be an efficient Sunday school teacher, and her mother was a notable housekeeper who had tolerated not so much as an offer of help from clumsy Patience. But she could sew neatly, and would no doubt darn her husband's socks to perfection; her voice had a pleasant tone whenever she dared to use it; and she was the most unselfish creature upon earth, with a heart like an artichoke and the courage of a mouse. She had been shipped off to the East because she was no longer welcome at home. Her mother was dead, and her brother, now the head of the family, and his young wife despised her, and looked upon her as an encumbrance. She was not very strong-minded; and when the minister under whom they sat suggested a means of providing for poor little Patience, her relations showed such eagerness to seize the opportunity that it was impossible to withstand them, even had she had any reasonable objection to offer, which she had not. So here she was, standing, one of seventeen, on the deck of the 'Trincomalee.'

'Cheer up, my dear,' said her neighbour, a buxom damsel, unafflicted with nerves and notions. 'One good thing, there'll be no mothers-in-law, at least none to speak of. For my own part I would not object to marrying a foundling; I don't hold with taking on a pack of your husband's relations for your own.'

'Ah,' sighed Patience, 'perhaps you're right. It isn't always too easy to live at peace with one's own family, let alone some one else's.'

'True, my dear, for such as you who couldn't hold your own with a daddy-longlegs. But we aren't all made alike, thank God.'

With which pharisaical observation she turned away, leaving poor Patience to reflect upon her shortcomings. These reflections had not materially improved her case before the ship came to an anchor, and her thoughts were diverted, not too agreeably, from

their channel by the sight of swarms of scantily clad natives jabbering and scuffling in the shore-boats alongside. None of the candidates had come out to the steamer, but awaited the arrival of its fair freight at the shipping office. Thither the gallant seventeen were duly conveyed under Mrs. Abbott's maternal eye; and indeed no better guardian could have been chosen than this shrewd but kind-hearted woman, whose task had been no sinecure since she left Liverpool a month before. Each gentleman in the order of his arrival at the office had been presented with a numbered ticket, No. 1 having been secured by a small, pale, patient missionary, whose first wife had been similarly purveyed, and who knew exactly how to proceed on this, the second 'auspicious occasion.' He sat quietly on a packing-case, with his ticket tightly clasped in his hand, apparently unconscious of the envious glances cast upon him by Nos. 2 to 17. Seven of the number were ministers, and the remainder proxies, who were distinguishable from their clerical brethren by the informality of their attire, whereas the missionaries were decently and unsuitably habited in black, and wore chimneypot hats. Mrs. Abbott was the first to ascend the steps, and advanced with becoming solemnity along the quay towards the shipping office, where she shook hands with one or two of the brotherhood, the great majority of whom, it must be admitted, wore a sheepish air, as though the sanction which custom kindly extended to their present business were not quite sufficient to keep them in countenance. The young women, while endeavouring to appear unconcerned, shot many a curious glance at their future lords—in the mass, all chaotic and unclassified—and more than one, even in the brief space which preceded the ceremony of choosing, breathed a hope that the one really handsome man of the party might be inspired to choose her for his bride. But he was a proxy, and, sad to say, the proxies were a better-looking set than the missionaries. Let us hope that no embryo Lancelots lurked in their midst. With them, at any rate, we have nothing to do.

Drawn up in two long rows, with Mrs. Abbott and the shipping agent between them, and with all the appearance of being arranged for some country dance or rustic game, the thirty-four contracting parties stood, and at a word from Mrs. Abbott the process of selection began. Five minutes was allowed to each gentleman in which to 'suit himself,' as the servants say. No. 1 rejecting, perhaps through bitter experience, the comelier of his *vis-à-vis*,

announced, after only three minutes' deliberation, that his choice had fallen upon the third young lady from the top. They were accordingly presented to one another, and fell out to make acquaintance, while the game proceeded as before. Sixteen selections had been made, and now there remained only the two who had no choice—Patience and the seventeenth missionary. We cannot here enter upon the discussion of a difficult and painful question, that of the suitability of certain persons to hold the office of spiritual pioneer to the heathen; but, if ever there was a bad specimen of a missionary, it was No. 17. That he was No. 17 was due to a partiality for cooling drinks at irregular intervals, and he had swallowed the last three on the way down to the shipping office, coming in hot, dusty and anathematical, five minutes later than No. 16.

'I say, Mrs. Abbott,' he began in a loud, coarse voice, 'I say, this isn't fair, you know. I'll complain to the authorities. It's a regular swindle. The girl's lame. I saw her limp coming up the steps. I won't have her at any price, not if I know it. You don't catch Adolphus Simkin making such a fool of himself. I have the honour to wish you a very good morning;' and, taking off his hat with an ironical flourish (though he never lifted it to anyone in the way of politeness), he took his departure, blundering as he went over the miscellaneous litter of the quay.

Patience stood transfixed with shame and terror. She had just sense to see that anything would be better than life with such a brute; but where was she to go? what could she do? Her heart failed her; and, but for the welcome support of Mrs. Abbott's friendly arm, she would have fallen.

'Don't you mind, my child,' the good woman whispered kindly; 'it's the greatest piece of luck for me. For you'll come up to Pagiri with me, and help me about the house and the farm, for I'm not as young as I was, and it's more than I can manage singlehanded.'

'Thank you,' murmured poor Patience, 'you're too kind; I'll only be a burden to you, but I don't know what else to do till I see my way.'

CHAPTER II.

It was a twenty-four hours' journey by rail to Pagiri, at that time a terminus. But a new line was in progress connecting it with Pamba, the capital of the district, and the little town was over-

flowing with coolies engaged upon the work, and its society augmented by the staff of Englishmen who directed their labours. The neighbourhood had much deteriorated during the last six months. Crime and the death-rate had increased fifty per cent., owing to a very complete system of overcrowding combined with a generous consumption of raw spirits. Cholera and smallpox were no longer mere visitors but naturalised inhabitants, presented with the freedom of the city; and for one chicken that had formerly strayed from Mrs. Abbott's fowl-yard into the hut of a hungry coolie there were now seven, plainly showing that the more equal distribution of the good things of this world is the direct product of civilisation. But for the prolongation of the line the simple natives of Pagiri would have been content with robbing Mrs. Abbott's henroosts once a week. Now the minister and his wife revelled no more frequently in the consumption of fowls, roast, boiled, or curried, than the deserving natives who surrounded them. Another result, and one which struck the Abbotts as being more distinctly advantageous, was that their social circle had gained by the arrival of the English engineers. Not one of them was of the missionary's way of thinking on religious matters, but he was a tolerant man, and permitted himself to enjoy a pleasant chat with a son of Belial now and then on topics purely worldly. Indeed, before long the bungalow became a much-favoured resort of several of the new-comers, with whom Mrs. Abbott was deservedly popular, and hardly an evening passed without one or more turning in at the gate for an hour's smoke in the verandah, and a bit of harmless gossip with the good man and his wife. Patience, who kept herself a good deal in the background on these occasions, was happier at Pagiri than she had ever been in her life. The soothing warmth of the atmosphere, both moral and climatic, had done wonderful things for her, and she began at length to look her age. At two years old she might have been a hundred; at fifteen, thirty-five; and at twenty, fifty. Now she was twenty-five, and looked it. The pained, drawn expression had left her face; her smooth skin had taken a faint tinge of pink; her white dress was made with less regard for economy than the grey linen; and she had developed a latent genius for housekeeping and a handy, helpful way which made her friends regard her as a valuable acquisition to their household, and congratulate themselves upon her rejection as a missionary's wife,

'She is reserved for some other fate, my dear,' Mr. Abbott had said to his wife with some solemnity as they sat together in the verandah one afternoon six months after Patience had become an inmate of their house. 'Predestination is at the bottom of it, you may depend. Providence intervened on her behalf.'

'It was time somebody did,' answered his wife, rather irreverently. 'Poor child, she has had a sad life, and I think she must have been half starved into the bargain, now that I see the difference being here has made in her. I shouldn't be surprised if she married and left us after all. She isn't so very lame, and she's a nice, sweet-tempered, handy little thing.'

Patience, who was laying the dinner-table, unintentionally overheard these remarks, and blushed and trembled, startled by the joyous leap her heart gave, and half afraid to contemplate the wonderful vista of possibilities which Mrs. Abbott's words had opened out before her timid eyes. For she had lost her heart, and without the slightest encouragement. Among the engineers was one who had lived for some years in the district. He had lost his wife when his little boy was born, and the child was now four years old, strong and hearty for one reared in the East, but, to an eye accustomed to English babies, only a poor little scrap. John Graham was grave beyond his years (which were thirty-five), but kindly and gentle with women and devoted to his little Jack. In his profession he was highly esteemed, and by all held to be an upright and honourable man, though more reserved than many of his associates quite understood or approved. His reserve had broken down before Mrs. Abbott's motherly concern for his child's welfare, and almost every evening, when the little fellow was in bed, he would come over from his unhomelike shanty and sit smoking, for the most part in silence, in the missionary's verandah. He never omitted, however, to pay his respects to Mrs. Abbott and Patience, whom he treated with as much courtesy as if she were a queen, and often allowed himself to stay awhile when the others were gone, chatting on a variety of subjects with the two women—subjects on which with the world at large he kept his own counsel. It was a sort of worship which the girl gave to the tall, grave man. They were too wide apart for love—indeed, there was something almost ludicrous in the mere suggestion of such a thing, and Patience's cheeks burned when she thought of it, and she rated herself soundly for giving way, even for a moment,

flowing with coolies engaged upon the work, and its society augmented by the staff of Englishmen who directed their labours. The neighbourhood had much deteriorated during the last six months. Crime and the death-rate had increased fifty per cent., owing to a very complete system of overcrowding combined with a generous consumption of raw spirits. Cholera and smallpox were no longer mere visitors but naturalised inhabitants, presented with the freedom of the city; and for one chicken that had formerly strayed from Mrs. Abbott's fowl-yard into the hut of a hungry coolie there were now seven, plainly showing that the more equal distribution of the good things of this world is the direct product of civilisation. But for the prolongation of the line the simple natives of Pagiri would have been content with robbing Mrs. Abbott's henroosts once a week. Now the minister and his wife revelled no more frequently in the consumption of fowls, roast, boiled, or curried, than the deserving natives who surrounded them. Another result, and one which struck the Abbotts as being more distinctly advantageous, was that their social circle had gained by the arrival of the English engineers. Not one of them was of the missionary's way of thinking on religious matters, but he was a tolerant man, and permitted himself to enjoy a pleasant chat with a son of Belial now and then on topics purely worldly. Indeed, before long the bungalow became a much-favoured resort of several of the new-comers, with whom Mrs. Abbott was deservedly popular, and hardly an evening passed without one or more turning in at the gate for an hour's smoke in the verandah, and a bit of harmless gossip with the good man and his wife. Patience, who kept herself a good deal in the background on these occasions, was happier at Pagiri than she had ever been in her life. The soothing warmth of the atmosphere, both moral and climatic, had done wonderful things for her, and she began at length to look her age. At two years old she might have been a hundred; at fifteen, thirty-five; and at twenty, fifty. Now she was twenty-five, and looked it. The pained, drawn expression had left her face; her smooth skin had taken a faint tinge of pink; her white dress was made with less regard for economy than the grey linen; and she had developed a latent genius for housekeeping and a handy, helpful way which made her friends regard her as a valuable acquisition to their household, and congratulate themselves upon her rejection as a missionary's wife.

'She is reserved for some other fate, my dear,' Mr. Abbott had said to his wife with some solemnity as they sat together in the verandah one afternoon six months after Patience had become an inmate of their house. 'Predestination is at the bottom of it, you may depend. Providence intervened on her behalf.'

'It was time somebody did,' answered his wife, rather irreverently. 'Poor child, she has had a sad life, and I think she must have been half starved into the bargain, now that I see the difference being here has made in her. I shouldn't be surprised if she married and left us after all. She isn't so very lame, and she's a nice, sweet-tempered, handy little thing.'

Patience, who was laying the dinner-table, unintentionally overheard these remarks, and blushed and trembled, startled by the joyous leap her heart gave, and half afraid to contemplate the wonderful vista of possibilities which Mrs. Abbott's words had opened out before her timid eyes. For she had lost her heart, and without the slightest encouragement. Among the engineers was one who had lived for some years in the district. He had lost his wife when his little boy was born, and the child was now four years old, strong and hearty for one reared in the East, but, to an eye accustomed to English babies, only a poor little scrap. John Graham was grave beyond his years (which were thirty-five), but kindly and gentle with women and devoted to his little Jack. In his profession he was highly esteemed, and by all held to be an upright and honourable man, though more reserved than many of his associates quite understood or approved. His reserve had broken down before Mrs. Abbott's motherly concern for his child's welfare, and almost every evening, when the little fellow was in bed, he would come over from his unhomelike shanty and sit smoking, for the most part in silence, in the missionary's verandah. He never omitted, however, to pay his respects to Mrs. Abbott and Patience, whom he treated with as much courtesy as if she were a queen, and often allowed himself to stay awhile when the others were gone, chatting on a variety of subjects with the two women—subjects on which with the world at large he kept his own counsel. It was a sort of worship which the girl gave to the tall, grave man. They were too wide apart for love—indeed, there was something almost ludicrous in the mere suggestion of such a thing, and Patience's cheeks burned when she thought of it, and she rated herself soundly for giving way, even for a moment,

to the wild flight her imagination had taken when she heard herself pronounced not unmarriageable.

Mrs. Abbott had carefully kept the secret of Patience's rejection from the gossips of Pagiri, but she could not close the mouths of all those young women—eye-witnesses of the incident—who were now scattered broadcast through the district as missionaries' wives. Graham rarely left Pagiri, where he was in charge of the works; but others went further afield, and one evening young Jameson came back from Pamba with a wonderful tale to tell, and brought it straight to the Engineers' Office, where they had just knocked off work.

'You know that girl up at old Abbott's,' he said to his chum, while Graham, unnoticed, was turning over some papers at his desk. 'Well, would you believe it, she was so wild to get married that she left her good home in Wales and came out here six months ago with a lot of others, in spite of her people's wishes, to be married to one of the bachelor missionaries—and not one of them would have her! I suppose they had been warned of the flighty sort of young woman she was. So she was in a nice fix, and Mrs. Abbott had to ask her to come and stay with her till she could find something to do, for the Missionary Society refused to give the girl her passage-money back to England.'

'Well, she's a deep one, then; she looks as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth. Where did you hear the story?'

'Oh, a fellow who had been up at Katali told me. The missionary has the only bungalow in the place, so he was staying there, and Mrs. Missionary, who was one of the cargo herself, told him.'

'Excellent authority, no doubt,' interrupted Graham. 'Perhaps you might hear something to the disadvantage of the lady at Katali if you asked Miss Owen. It would be a valuable addition to your collection of "Queer Stories," and make you a welcome guest at some houses where gossip is thoroughly appreciated.' And Graham, who rarely spoke to his subordinates save on matters of business, gathered up his papers, and left the two young men uncertain whether to be more surprised or offended by his observations.

Graham himself was disgusted. He did not believe that what he had just heard was correct in all its details, but he feared that the main fact—that of Patience's having come out to Shikarore to be married—was likely to be true. It was a shock to him to find

that the demure little woman with the sweet voice and quiet ways, whom he had got to like almost insensibly, was after all nothing but a vulgar husband-hunter, and he was pained and irritated by the idea. His horror of gossip forbade his broaching the subject to Mrs. Abbott, so he put it away at the back of his mind, and, but for a slight shade of coldness in his manner to Patience, it produced no outward effect. But, keenly alive to all that concerned Graham's intercourse with herself, Patience immediately perceived the change, and, conscious of the weak place in her armour, concluded that the hated incident had been made known to him. Her face began once more to assume the careworn expression which her kind friends had believed banished for ever, and she no longer sang as she went about her work. Graham came no less frequently to the house, and scarcely a day passed on which Patience did not see him. But this was now more a pain than a pleasure to her, and she was almost glad when he announced one evening that he had been summoned to attend a meeting of Directors at Pamba, and that this, along with some other work at a distance, would keep him away for about a fortnight. He asked Mrs. Abbott to look in on the little boy now and then to see that all was well, although he had the greatest confidence in the child's ayah; and Patience ventured to join with Mrs. Abbott in assuring him that they would look after little Jack during his father's absence. But Graham's formal words of thanks sent a chill to her heart, and she wished she had not spoken.

CHAPTER III.

GRAHAM had been away for ten days, and Patience had not passed one without making a pilgrimage to his house in the faithful fulfilment of her promise to look after his little lonely child. They had become fast friends, and Jack watched anxiously for 'Pacie's' coming, skipping out on to the verandah to meet her, and demanding the stories which he had discovered she was a very good hand at telling. But on the eleventh day 'Baba Sahib he being very sick' were the words with which the ayah greeted her, and her heart sank as she followed the woman into the nursery. Little Jack was in high fever, and Patience directed the ayah to go or send for the doctor without a moment's delay. Then she took off her hat, and sat down beside the child's cot, soothing him with

gentle words and touches, and singing in a hushed voice one or two of the old psalm tunes which were her only songs. At last the doctor came, pronounced that the child 'looked uncommonly like smallpox,' and asked Patience if she intended to stay, as the ayah already showed signs of losing her head.

'Of course I will stay,' answered Patience (adding to herself, 'Nothing is likely to happen to me just because I could so well be spared'). I shall be glad if you will tell Mrs. Abbott what keeps me here, and she will send over somebody with what things I shall want.' So the doctor gave his orders, and, being in a hurry, as he always was nowadays, took his leave, and Patience's watch began. About an hour later the medicines and a small trunk containing her clothes arrived, with a kindly message from Mrs. Abbott, and then the stillness of night closed round the bungalow, broken only by the sick child's impatient moaning and tossing, which Patience was now powerless to still. All night she watched, and all the next day she would not let her strained and weary eyes close for one moment lest she should fall asleep at her post. When the doctor came in for the third time on that day, he looked so grave that her fears were thoroughly aroused, and she could not have slept had she tried. Against such raging fever the child's strength could not hold out much longer, and when the doctor looked in at five o'clock on the second morning he was scarcely surprised to see the poor little man lying pale and exhausted in his cot, with nothing but his faint breathing to show he lived.

'I fear he cannot last through the day,' said the young man, 'even if he were to take all the nourishment I order for him. The fever has burnt the life out of him, poor little chap; and no one knows where his father is. None of my telegrams have been answered.' And the doctor was off once more.

Patience's eyes filled with the tears that would not be kept back when she thought of Graham's despair. 'O God,' she murmured, 'take me, and let little Jack live. Take me, and let me be at rest, for I have no place here, O Lord.' Little Jack opened his eyes, and when she looked at him she knew her prayer was vain.

When the doctor had paid his evening visit, and was on his way back to the town, he met Graham, hurrying with a grey, set face towards his bungalow.

'Is he . . . alive?' he asked hoarsely.

'My dear fellow, he is conscious,' said the doctor, and sped on, knowing he could say no more.

Graham stopped on the threshold to take off his boots, and then softly entered the nursery. Patience was seated beside her charge, with a tiny hand clasped in one of hers, while with the other she screened her face from the child, lest he should see her tears. But he was lying quite still, with closed eyes, and it was only when Graham whispered, 'Jack, my little man, Daddy is here,' that he showed signs of consciousness. Then he tried to raise himself from his pillow, but fell back on his father's shoulder with a sigh and a piteous murmur of 'Jack so tired, Daddy,' that went through poor Graham's heart like a knife. He took the child into his arms, and Patience, relinquishing the little hand, tried to steal away unobserved. But Jack's 'Not go 'way, Pacie,' brought her back to her post, and kept her there until the end came.

From time to time the child would swallow a few spoonfuls of food, uttering a few words of plaintive remonstrance,—either 'Jack so tired,' or 'Let Jack alone.' Once he asked 'Pacie' to sing 'Fox,' and, steadying her voice with an effort, she gently crooned 'When shepherds watched their flocks by night.' He was too weak to say the customary 'adenn' when she had finished, and lay quite motionless till just before his death. Then he looked up into his father's face and said, 'Kiss Jack, Daddy; Jack goin' bye. Pacie, kiss Jack too.'

Five minutes later Patience knew that her vigil was at an end, and she crept noiselessly from the room.

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT day Patience had sickened with smallpox, and Mrs. Abbott hastily migrated to Graham's bungalow to nurse her. It was a sharp attack, but the little woman weathered it bravely, thanks to her naturally wiry constitution and her friend's careful nursing. When she was allowed to sit up in bed she asked for a looking-glass, trembling exceedingly lest one more trial might be in store for her in the disfigurement of her poor little face, at no time of more than passable comeliness. Was it wrong of her to thank God for having spared her this further affliction? It meant so much to one of her shrinking disposition, whose path through life would have become even harder had she believed

herself to be a repulsive object as well as stupid, dull, awkward, and unwelcome. And she had dreaded—for was she not a woman?—the painful impression which her countenance, blurred and altered, would have produced upon her hero's mind, kindly as he would have striven to conceal the fact.

When she was considered out of quarantine Graham came to see her, and her shyness in receiving him was much tempered with gentle sympathy, for she had shared his sorrow with him, and no longer felt herself on a different platform. He did not allude to his loss, but kept the conversation on everyday subjects, never permitting it to flag, and drawing out his companion's ideas with so much tact that she forgot to be nervous, and delighted him with her quaint sayings and simple unworldly wisdom. Now Graham had just heard the true story of Patience Owen from Mrs. Abbott, and pitied her sincerely, though he could not rid his mind of the notion that a girl who allowed herself, without a word of protest, to be put in the undignified position of a candidate for marriage with a total stranger would hardly have the strength of character to steer a straight course through life—speaking the truth and shaming the devil—and so he proposed to himself to put her to the test, with the idea that if she came through it triumphantly he would consider the advisability of asking her to be his wife. Therefore, when at length a pause occurred in their conversation, Graham, instead of rising to go, suddenly resumed his serious manner, and remarked, 'We are friends, Miss Owen, are we not?'

'Yes,' faltered Patience, all at once grown shy.

'And friends will not fall out for a trifle?'

'No, indeed,' she answered. 'I have so few that I could not afford that.'

'Then will you tell me what brought you out to Pagiri?'

Poor Patience blushed painfully, twisted her fingers in her pocket-handkerchief, and showed every sign of distress. 'I left home because they didn't want me,' she said hurriedly and with downcast eyes, 'and came out to marry one of the missionaries. No one would have me, so Mrs. Abbott took me to live with her.'

What it cost her to make such a confession Graham dimly guessed. He hated himself for his cruelty, and a great wave of compassion for the poor forlorn girl swept through his heart—compassion mingled with admiration for her courage. 'Forgive me,' he said. 'Poor child, there is a great deal of happiness

owing to you. Do you think I could make your life brighter? Patience, will you let me try?' But before she could answer him Mrs. Abbott had bustled into the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE directors at Pamba telegraphed for Graham once more on the day following his visit to Patience, and she made up her mind that on his return a week later he should not find her at Pagiri. 'He shall not marry me out of pity,' she said to herself. 'He cannot possibly love me, and without his love I could not be his wife. It would break my heart.' So with a good deal of difficulty she persuaded Mrs. Abbott that she had centred all her hopes on becoming a hospital nurse, begging her to use her influence with the matron of the great hospital at Khansal, so that she might be taken on at once as a probationer. The day before Graham returned to Pagiri Patience had left, and as she was being deposited twenty-four hours later with her modest luggage at the gates of the hospital, tired out and heartsick now that the excitement of her flight was past, Graham was crossing the bit of waste land which lay between his own bungalow and the Abbotts', turning over in his mind as he walked what he should say to Patience if only Mrs. Abbott would give him a chance of seeing her alone.

His surprise was great when he heard of her departure, and that night he smoked in stony silence—'for all the world like a deaf-mute,' Mrs. Abbott complained when he had gone. Next day, after making arrangements so that his work should not suffer during his absence, he gave himself forty-eight hours' leave, and took the train for Khansal.

Patience had been given a day's rest after her journey, but on the second day she had begun her training, and in the old grey linen gown, large white apron, and mob-cap she had been all day long receiving instruction in her future duties. The sights which she saw made her seriously doubt her suitability for the profession she had chosen, and from standing about for so many hours she was ready to faint with fatigue. She could not eat, and felt weary and lonely to the very last degree. At seven o'clock she was free, and on her way to her own little cubicle, where she hoped to lie down for an hour before supper, but she was stopped by a message

from the matron to the effect that there was a visitor for Miss Owen—not yet metamorphosed into Sister Patience—and would she ‘step down’ into the dining-hall? Wonderingly she obeyed the summons, thinking as she went down the long flights of stairs how fatiguing it would be to ‘step up’ again.

The long cool dining-room was very dark, and she was not at first quite sure that it was John Graham who stood before her. But when he held out his hand, saying, ‘Patience, why did you run away from Pagiri when you knew I had something to say to you?’ she felt all that his presence at Khansal meant. She tried to speak so as to answer his question, or at least to ask him how he did, but no words would come. And when he saw the tired white face, and felt how her hand trembled, he did not press for a reply, but led her to a sofa and sat down beside her. ‘I have come to fetch you home, dear,’ he said. ‘You are not strong enough for the work here, and I want you very much.’

MY ALBUM.

THAT'S my first love, faded and thin. The photograph, I mean, not the young lady; she is far from that. I saw her only last month; I came in upon her at lunch-time. She was eating a sweet omelette and drinking bottled stout. I dare say she is just as glad she hasn't married me, as I am I haven't married her. The fact is people can't indulge in stout in June with impunity, and Phyllis must make up her mind whether she will take to the pleasures of the table, or keep her old admirers and her figure. As Amanda does, on milk and lettuces.

It is odd that this old album of mine, unearthed like a collection of postage-stamps, from heaven knows where, should open at that page. For first love glances at me demurely from it, in fancy dress, coquettish with a fan; first love that has touched with fire so many nervous and anguished quills. And yet, to be quite calm and judicial, I have doubts whether first love means more than the natural delight all must take in the earliest revelation of any one of the pleasures or fine sights in life. The first visit to the play, the first sight of the sea, the first journey abroad; there is nothing quite like them in later years: but only, I think, because they are the first; for I am quite sure they do not exclude happiness, and often a truer happiness by far, in subsequent experiences. No man, of course, forgets his first pantomime, but for all that he may enjoy the theatre more than ever; and not only the theatre, but lying on the sands, and tripping over to Antwerp; aye, and being in love.

My album is one almost entirely of school and college, and it is only at the end that I have a few presentments of the gentler sex. I am inclined to think it better so; for time, so kindly in most aspects, is pitiless with fashions. Time will often deal tenderly with a face, but he is savage over a chignon, and though he may spare a woman's charm, he is brutal with her costume. No one need be ashamed of pointing out Phyllis to his friends with gloom, and explaining how much she made him suffer, for she is in fancy dress, and fancy dress is stationary and becoming. But those same friends whose voices are sympathetically hushed over Phyllis as goddess of the spring, burst into wild cackle of laughter

over the lady next her, whose head is crowned with monstrous plaits, and whose pretty figure bulges in a terrible savage costume of ruches and pleatings and bows. So I am glad I have not too many of them, nor too many of solid aunts in cascades of *moire antique*, nor of gentlemen in curly hats, who to the modern eye look like lion comiques, though they were ornaments of the Row in '69; nor of little sisters, married since, and mothers, with their feet at right angles and ribbons in their bushy hair, and the ends of the photographer's rest sticking out round their plump necks. No, my book is mainly a book of the friends of my youth, of the boys and young men with whom I went arm-in-arm down the school high street, to whom I drank across the long club tables at the university. Let us look in upon them and see, short though the time may be, what roads they have travelled since then.

For short though the time is, some have gone up in the world, and some have gone down, to reappear with wild eyes and matted hair, and borrow money. Only last autumn, late September, very wild and wet, I was sitting over an early fire in a country house when summoned to a rain-soaked figure in the hall. It was Parkes, whose photograph beams youthfully in my book here, between the member for Sarum, engaged last week to a girl with twenty thousand a year, and the gallant young Lancer whose promotion to a troop I saw gazetted only this morning. If I look into the young Parkes's eyes, that smile so hopefully, I can detect nothing of the hard fate that was to drive him down so low. Character is fate, says Novalis, but I confess I can neither read nor recall anything in the character of the boy that was to play him so harsh a trick as a man. He had no money, he says, and was weak and ill in London, and he thought he could earn something and get a little fresh air by joining a band of hop-pickers in Kent. But the season has gone against them, and it has done nothing but rain, and seeing me pass in the village——. He pauses eloquently and diffidently, and in a flash I recall the last time I saw him, when at the end of the summer term he sat down just after lock-up to write his name across his likeness. I could hear the clatter of young feet along the passages, and the cries and laughter, the house-supper singing from across the road, and the solemn school-clock that struck and seemed to toll the last passing moments of our boyhood. Parkes has gone down in the world, but there is always Fortune for him with her wheel. One twist of

it and the barque that has hitherto known no steersman, drifting here and there over the dark waters, cuts gallantly into harbour, and is at rest from wandering. For what greater consolation has life for all of us than the blessings that so often descend on our small deserts? Tom Jones, happy at last in the possession of his Sophia; and that scamp of a Gil Blas, a man of consideration and position, with all the long Andalusian evenings to laugh over his old bright rogueries.

There is some little romance in this book of mine, some few imprudent marriages, some dire wrestling with poverty and misapprehension. Here's that good fellow Stephen, one of those fine and open natures that in their richness just lacking judgment play more havoc with their fortunes than others far poorer. Poor Stephen has made a bad marriage, has succumbed to an affection which I suppose he should have wrestled with and conquered; and for all I know of him, may be living some dreadful retired watering-place life, gradually growing fat and sour. He comes no more to the club, nor to chambers, has, in fact, become a *disparu*, and yet, so mysteriously are we compounded, I confess I cannot help altogether envying him; for, after all, I have my strong suspicions the young fellow is perfectly happy. At any rate, if I had to choose, I would rather be he than Beaufoy, who has won the angular affections of Lord Blanker's eldest girl, and lives with her frigidly in a brown house in Green Street. Position has a poor chance when it stands side by side with content, and if Stephen's is the goatherd's cottage of poverty and fresh cheese, Beaufoy's is the icemaiden's palace down in the depths of the glacier.

And, again, here is Dean, standing in grey, next the cymbals and big drum of the school volunteers. War in those days delighted Dean's ardent soul, and war these last few years has been his. Not, indeed, the war of the high shrill clarion, nor the malevolent ping of the rifle, but war that to many stout hearts is infinitely more bitter, infinitely more full of privation and sting; Amazonic war, the war of female relatives armed to the teeth, with tongues to which if they give one twist the wound is incurable. You see, Dean was reading in the country with an army coach; in the country where are always the freshest vegetables and the most outrageous scandal, the richest milk and the most cold-blooded murders; and there he fell in love with a woodsawyer's daughter, and not a particularly beautiful daughter either. I can't explain

it, for love is a mystery, almost the only one left us ; I simply state it as a fact, that Dean saw in the girl the one woman destined to make him happy, and that when he went up for his examination to Burlington House (which, by the way, he failed to pass), he took his Susie with him, and from suburban lodgings wrote to inform his father she was his wife. Fathers have had such letters before, and will have many such again, but they will never get to like them ; and no father ever, perhaps, liked such a communication less than Mr. Dean, who was himself meditating a union somewhat similar with a clever governess. And the daughters, Dean's sisters ! the elderly neuralgic one, and the youngest just out and fearful of having her chances spoilt by her brother's *mésalliance*, and the lady that came between with no office in life but good works and malice—why, their shrill rectory cries reverberated in that one suburban room where I have often heard them, with its bed in one corner and plain table by the window, on which Dean was always trying to learn his drill with pieces of matches for men, and Susie manœuvring them for him out of the red book. He and she have had many an up and down since then, and have by no means done struggling, but I believe they'll end by beating the sisters yet, and spending their Christmas in the old house which the ladies have vowed by all their tea-table gods that Susie shall never enter. Except, of course, over their bodjes. Romance, romance, my book is full of it, and every other book, too, that holds the likenesses of men. Here are younger sons who have come into their brothers' fortunes, their brothers having fallen over Colorado peaks, or died of fever in Italy, or been hurried away with an Afghan matchlock bullet through the heart. Here's a young gentleman has had a fortune left him by a man he never saw, and now need never climb an omnibus, nor swelter second-class on the Underground again ; here's another has run through his money, and glad enough to speak a couple of lines at the 'Empress,' and come on as a policeman in the knockabout Christmas pantomime ; here's one ruined by speculation and kept by his young wife's music lessons, and, so easily do we become base, getting rather to like it, and I doubt will ever try again. Here's the unlucky Arthur, who married a bad wife, rid himself of her, and has only just united himself to a second not so very much better. Here's one sane enough in those days and a hard leg-hitter, which I take to be a sign of sanity, as mad now as vanity and religion can make him ; and

here's another clean cracked in a laboratory with making diamonds and peering after specks of gold.

I have many groups of societies and clubs and reading parties. Somehow, when five-and-twenty is passed, one is no longer photographed in a group. We are all too deeply occupied in playing our own game, I suppose, to come together in the old kindly fashion under the lens, and after five-and-twenty our last group is that of marriage. But here we all are, done on the Rhine, and somehow managing to look very German. Those were the pleasant days when we danced at Unkel, in the great tent on a Sunday, and drank sour wine, and in the evening sat round the old professor and heard him expound the stories of the stars. One of us is a schoolmaster, and one an aide-de-camp, and one a parson, and the rest beat the hot pavements of the Temple and drone away the days in court and library. And if sometimes we fall asleep over our books, I think we sometimes dream of the shady courtyard of our pension and the garden under the cherry-trees where we used to work, and can sometimes hear the songs of the regiments passing in the early morning and the *susurrus* of the Rhine, parting and falling round the shady island. I have no photograph of the place itself, nor of the proprietor of the pension, with his long beard and still longer pipe, nor of his pretty daughter and her friend, staying with her to master cookery before her marriage, nor of the rusty troubadour with dyed moustache who used to tinkle his guitar under the limes with a plate in front of him for our contributions; but they are all grouped together faithfully in my memory, and behind them stretches the long cool ride up to the ruined abbey in the mountains, where are the uneven mounds of the dead nuns, and the sunken crosses over which the mosses creeping scarcely leave a trace of the deeply graven *Ruhe in Gottes Schooss*—Rest in God's bosom!

From the abbey of Heisterbach to a railway arch on the Surrey side is a far cry, but I am called thither by a strange photograph of a woman in a long cloak, round whose shrunken body is wound a long thick rope. She holds an end in either hand and looks out straight in front of her, emaciated, haggard, startled. Any one who will may take the rope and beat her with it. She committed a great crime, she has been a great sinner, and nothing shall be forgiven her, for she hated much. So she stands under the railway arch on the Surrey side, mute and suffering, excommunicate and abhorrent to herself and all.

Here is her history. Frances J. was the daughter of a country doctor, one of those men of great natural energy and physique, whose chief faculty wanting seems to be that of taking rest; one of those men, temperate and powerful, who are the life if they are not the soul of a country district, on all the boards and author of all the county schemes, and who die as they have lived, standing and working. He had two daughters, Frances and Louisa, whose mother had died when they were quite little, and whose place had been taken by Frances since her sixteenth year; when, presenting herself quietly before her father in his study, she requested the dismissal of the governess, since, said she, Miss Evans had nothing more to teach her and was only a useless expense; and from that day till the day of her father's death Frances was everything in the household, educating her younger sister and still finding time to carry her own education further, more especially in the direction of science, to which she was passionately devoted. When she was twenty and her sister Louisa eighteen, there came as an assistant in the practice a certain George B., a young doctor of thirty, who, after a career of more or less vagabondage—ship's surgeon and the rest of it—was desirous of settling down to work and becoming respectable. He was one of those nonchalant, observant, selfish, and yet humorous natures that, with a deep touch of the scoundrel in them, seem specially framed to attract women, and with him Frances at once fell deeply in love, deeply and silently as her nature was. She never seemed to wonder or reflect whether her affection were returned; it was enough for her to feel it; until one afternoon she surprised George and her sister in a secret interview that left her no doubt as to the existence of an understanding between them. She gave no sign of agitation, nor appeared to notice their being together, but contented herself with writing George a note, in which she desired to see him that night in the dining-room, when the house was quiet. It was from that moment that she felt with a certain terror, in itself a kind of pleasure to her, how overmastering was her passion and how all else must yield to it, and when she was alone with him, calm as she seemed, there was raging within her something of the demon of the Borgias and Brinvilliers. 'I have sent for you,' she said, 'that I may speak and not you! I want you to understand that you will ruin yourself if you attach yourself to my sister. On my father's death—and he may die at any moment—everything is to be left to me, to my complete discretion and control; and if you

marry her, even in my father's lifetime, there will not be one sixpence for you. I am too proud to suggest any alternative that may seem distasteful to you.' George looked at her. 'It was the merest flirtation,' he said. 'I cannot live without an affair, an affection of some kind, and you have never seemed to like me.'

Frances gave him her hand. 'You know only the liking of the novels; I will show you one outside of them. But I demand the most absolute fidelity. Put an end to this absurdity with Louisa in any way you please. I shall say nothing to her or to my father, and I desire you to make no mention to her of my interference. Wait only for me, and be silent. Good night.'

And then began a struggle in the house, the more terrible for its silence. Not a word was said by any of the combatants, and no one present, unless he were a student of gesture and glance and of all those words unsaid which in these crises are so much more significant than talk, would have guessed that at that decorous supper-table he was a spectator of a tragedy antique in its intensity and catastrophe. For the fact is that George was attracted by Louisa and repelled by Frances; was, so far as his nature went, in love with her, and determined to marry her, and, though he dared not come to an open rupture or an open avowal, he made up his mind to sound the doctor and at the same time learn something of the disposal of the money.

The doctor, like all busy men who live but little in their families, either in thought or fact, listened to him patiently and decided promptly. He accepted the young man's assurance that he had not yet spoken to his daughter, and desired him not to do so for a year, when she would be of a more suitable age and George's position more certain, and ended by saying that anything he might leave behind him would be equally divided between his girls, and that George was heartily welcome to Louisa's share with her, if only he showed himself worthy of it and her. And then he dismissed the affair altogether from his mind, and in a day or two quite forgot it. He had done his duty, he thought, and went about his work in the belief that he had acted like a good and prudent father. Three months later, his position in the house becoming intolerable, George determined to come to an understanding with Frances, and had an interview with her as before late at night. There, driven to a desperate and cowardly expedient, he told her that what he had said as to his flirtation with her sister was not true, that it was something far more serious,

and that as a man of honour he was bound to marry Louisa and that speedily. Frances believed George's story, and her determination was quickly taken. She made up her mind to kill her sister and save at the same time the poor girl's honour and her own passion. She contented herself with upbraiding George and seeming to accept the position; and, not to enter into detail, she left the town with her sister on a visit, and within a fortnight the poor girl was dead, poisoned. A few nights later she had a last interview with George—an interview he did all in his power to avoid. It was brief and violent, and overheard. There she avowed her crime and defended it. George's passionate answer was that what he had said was a lie, a fabrication to escape from her furious jealousy and importunities, and that he would denounce her. There was a cry and a fall in the passage outside, and hurrying there, panic-stricken, they found the doctor, dying. Though he never spoke again, it was evident he had overheard all. There is no need to trace all Frances' gradual and terrible punishment. Almost the strangest part of the story, perhaps, is that she and George were married, after all.

Here's a blunt-headed boy with a large mouth and rough hair, who is gradually bursting and overflowing like a cotton-pod into a demagogue. He was Cleon, the leatherseller, in our school debating society, and quite a snatcher of Spartan cakes from Pylos in the Union, with a fine flow of Cleon language, entirely of the scraps of leather order of that famous man. I admire most in him his indomitable energy and perseverance, for in hot and cold weather he is just the same, pausing neither to blow his knuckles nor wipe his brow. I meet him occasionally in the Strand, shouldering his way through the crowd with lowering eyes and muttering lips. Not money enough yet, he says, to go into the House, but just money enough to wait, while meantime he tears about the country, to the Giggleswick Athenæum to lecture on the true meaning of Democracy, or the Salsford Liberal Club on Philosophic Radicalism. Advance, friend Cleon! the hour will come when thou wilt savagely bite thy nails below the gangway and pad and fret the river-terrace.

Among other politicians I have those staunch Conservatives Wardour and Lesley, county members both of them, and with all the reverence in the world for their views and party, I cannot look at them without laughing. What on earth do they know about politics? They were both of them pretty low down in the school,

and neither has taken any pains since to make up for lost time. Only yesterday I walked with them across St. James's Park down to the House, and in my pleasant way I bantered them on the subject. 'Ah!' said I, 'if everybody knew as much about you legislators as I do, there would be a Revolution. The learned masses would rise and drag you off the benches. I know what you're laughing at,' I continued; 'you're laughing at learned masses. I only use the adjective relatively, and I do maintain that compared with you the masses *are* learned. I maintain that the Board School boy knows a hundred times more than you, educated as you have been; knows a hundred times more history and literature; in a word, is a hundred times better informed. Could either of you sketch for me the history of the rupture of our relations with America—have either of you studied Ireland, even in Froude? And yet how blithe a vote will you give on Coercion or the Crimes Act! While my School Board hero—' 'Great heaven!' said Lesley, with a shudder, 'you're a Radical!'

I do not suggest these two young men are impostors; I only affirm they are hopelessly ignorant. But next to them there is an impostor, and a very pretty impostor, too. Ah, my dear Postern, I know you, and you know I know you, and it is useless trying your thoughtful airs with me, or that pathetic aspect of overwork. You were born a humbug, Postern, and a humbug you will die. You posed over your coral and bells, affecting to see in them symbols of a universal vanity, and at the last you will pose and make large sad eyes at the nurse who attends to soothe your remaining hours. It would be a treat for Diogenes to walk down Piccadilly with Postern. Talk on what lofty subject you will, any one of the many that Postern affirms touch him to the soul, directly he gets into Piccadilly he loses his head. His eyes are all over the street and he answers at random. He bows with a sweet melancholy smile to a victoria and gives a short statesman-like nod to a hansom cab; and directly he gets into the Row he darts from your side and bends over chairs, pressing little gloved hands and murmuring like the south-west wind among the pines. He believes himself a happy combination of Cobbett and Disraeli, with a dash of Lord George Bentinck, and he never dislikes me so thoroughly as when I get him to talk of his father, a Radical manufacturer of the North. He will marry a wife who will preside over a second-rate political salon in South Kensington, and he will die an under-secretary of the Local Government Board.

For, notwithstanding all his accomplishments, all his Chesterfieldian *graces* and *douceurs*, what he really cares and knows most about, as he explains pathetically, are the needs and welfare of the people.

Of my young friends, there are perhaps one-third of them married. You may comment on and wonder at married life for ever, and not get much further in deciding who is happiest, Benedick before or Benedick after. I can only say that of all my married contemporaries, I meet with none of them whom the ceremony has superlatively improved or rendered superlatively happy. Their happiness may, perhaps, lie far hid from the common eye, but I take it happiness is bound to show one way or the other, and I certainly meet with more merry bachelors than merry married men. And, again, how bad a citizen marriage will often make of a man; how it will narrow him and make him selfish! My impression is that the State ought to interfere and limit the number, as the commanding officer does with the soldiers in his regiment. Depend upon it, the free man will always go furthest in life, as that battalion marches with greater dash and security which is least hampered with camp-followers.

Neither fame nor death has been very busy with this book of mine. None of us have as yet done anything great—and by anything great I mean something permanent—nor, if you ask me seriously, ever will. The fact is, we are upper middle class, and until the upper middle classes are ruined and reconstructed, nothing permanent will come out of them; for their foundations are pretence and imposture, and the lives of their members are one long struggle after a false eminence and a hollow position. If ever a genuine melody comes out of South Kensington, or a fine book out of Mayfair, or a great picture out of Tyburnia, or an expression of simple or lofty feeling of any kind out of the whole West district, then, and not till then, it will be proof that there has at last begun an honest and wholesale destruction of the old false gods, those hideous deities of the Unfriendly Islands whose worshippers have been so often and so truly branded as snobs. No, it is the poor who always have been and always will be the creators; the men who cannot pay for their colours, their paper, their instruments; those sturdy, cheerful, undaunted natures constantly struggling with poverty and want—‘Nobles cœurs sous les man-sardes où l’on ne trouve que trois chaises, un lit, une table!’

Death, as I say, has not been very busy with my book, has

scarcely seemed to think us hitherto worth powder and shot; though one, struck by him in Death's true inexplicable fashion, lies far away under the pines of the Tyrol, where the Inn falls headlong through the dark gorges of the mountains. Death often seems to me to throw his dart as the reckless soldier fires off his piece, in mere wantonness; striking some gallant and generous heart as the peasant's bullet finds a home in the great brain of the general, scathless until now in face of all the artillery of Europe. Frank was my friend, and the best I had; brilliant and reckless, generous, kind, brave, a scholar, a wit. He was scarcely of age when he died. Next him is Murphy, selfish and petty, rich and unhealthy. He will live to be very old, I should think, he is so useless and so unpopular. He was in our set and professed the greatest admiration for Frank. Last autumn he spent some time at Innsbruck, but somehow he never found an opportunity to visit the cross that marks the poor boy's resting-place. *Sic transit amicitia mundi!*

GROUSE AND PTARMIGAN.

THE British red grouse—the common culinary grouse that we cook and eat in our unfeeling way from the twelfth of August onward—is a proud bird, and it occupies in many ways a proud and, indeed, unique position in these three kingdoms. For, in the first place, its coming of age, as a great philosopher remarks (yes, grouse have attracted the attention even of great philosophers), gives the signal in ordinary years, when ‘order reigns in Ireland,’ for the prorogation of Parliament, with the consequent scattering of our overworked legislators to the four winds of heaven. And, in the second place, it stands by itself among the beasts, birds, reptiles, and amphibians as the only species peculiar to our country and not found at all in any part of the adjacent continent. Alone among the higher animals, at least, it can claim to be considered a son of the soil, a genuine autochthon, an undeniable native-born subject of her Majesty, while all the rest are but naturalised aliens. This double lien upon the attention of all true-born Britons, of which, indeed, it is the most British at heart, may surely justify a warm admirer of the grouse tribe (they *are* very nice, you know, on toast, with grated bread-crumbs) in devoting a few serious pages to the details of their pedigree and their general relation to the partridge and ptarmigan faction.

Let me begin, however, by briefly explaining (for the benefit of my dreaded foe, Mr. Critic Smelfungus) that when I say ‘the only species peculiar to this country’ I mean the only species of beast, bird, amphibian, or reptile, to the exclusion of fishes, insects, and other such-like small-deer of our native fauna. I will grant, for the sake of peace and quiet, that many freshwater tarns or lakes of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland have developed, on their own account, local species of trout, gwyniad, char, or pollan, which learned Dr. Günther, of the British Museum (who knows more about fish than any man living) declares to be strictly tied up in their particular ponds, lochs, or marshes. This is natural enough, of course, because communications from tarn to tarn (by water, at least) are rare and difficult; so that the trout of each tiny mountain lake in Kerry or Cumberland have found themselves

left free to develop along their own lines, without reference to the conflicting views or tastes of their distant neighbours in the Orkney Isles or on the Snowdonian shoulders. Freshwater lakes, in fact, form the aquatic analogue of oceanic islands, where, as everybody knows, strange creatures have a free field to evolve themselves to their heart's content—dodos and moas and chimæras dire, lizards as big as an ordinary cow, and wingless birds of the apteryx type, that look like beasts with their hairy coats, and wander alone at night, after the manner of the common ghost, to frighten the superstitious exploring sailor. Nor will I deny the doubtful claims of some few British butterflies, moths, and beetles to differ, more or less conspicuously (most often in very unimportant points), from their continental fellows. I will even admit (if it gives any Lundy man pleasure to learn it) that Lundy Island, with conspicuous gallantry, has developed two ugly and insignificant little weevils on its own account. But all these exceptions, taken for what they are worth, leave our main principle quite intact, that, so far as the higher animals, at least, are concerned, the true grouse is the only beast, bird, or reptile really confined within the four sea walls of this isle of Britain.

Two little English birds, to be sure—the coal titmouse and the long-tailed titmouse—‘present well-marked differences of colour,’ says a distinguished authority, ‘as compared with continental specimens.’ But if anybody chooses to fling that obscure fact pugnaciously at my head, I shall retort that much the same difference of colour, in hair, eyes, and beard, obtains between Italians and Englishmen, whom I nevertheless obstinately persist in regarding as both members of the self-same human species. The distinguished authority distinguishes overmuch. Why, talk of colour! is not even our beloved friend Quashie, as he has so often inquired of us, with eloquent outstretched hands that clank their chains from ten thousand tracts, ‘a man and a brother’?

To return to our grouse, then, from this polemical digression; how does it come about that that single species should be peculiar to Britain, when all the rest of our higher fauna is all but absolutely identical with the fauna of the opposite continent?

Fully to understand the answer to this profound question, we must get to know a little more, I think, of our bird's antecedents. We must inquire into its own previous history, and the character of its family, which has always filled a most respectable position in various parts of the northern hemisphere, and has been the

subject of much legislative attention, as well as the recipient of the most anxious medical treatment.

In a very wide sense, the grouse and partridge group form a great subdivision of the game-bird order—a subdivision which, for exactness' sake, I shall henceforth describe in this present paper as the grouse family. If I indulged in the common scientific slang, I should call them the *Tetraonidæ*; but as nobody says *Tetraonidæ* in private life and in good society, I prefer to distinguish them by a simpler name, that can be understood of the people in their own vernacular. This family, again, unable (like most other families) to agree among itself, split up, at a very early period (date unknown), into two tribes—that of the grouse-kind proper, including the red grouse, willow-grouse, ptarmigan, and blackcock, and that of the partridge-like birds, including the true partridge, the quail, and many handsome American species, whose uncouth names, as William of Malmesbury, with exquisite English feeling, remarks of the ancient Welsh chieftains, 'because of their barbarism, I refrain from mentioning.' Scientific Latin is seldom Ciceronian, and never entertaining.

The question of minute organisation, over which the two tribes originally split up, was, of course, as unimportant as the differences which separated the factions of Liliput into Big-endians and Little-endians, or as all the other quarrels which in human life disturb the peace of families with their ridiculous intervention. The partridges, which are mostly lowland-feeding birds, with a taste for a civilised grain diet, have open nostrils and bare legs; while the more restricted grouse tribe, in the sense above indicated, being chiefly mountain and forest feeders, have the nostrils closed by a soft-feathered skin, and legs and toes closely covered with down, which gives them a sort of frilled and trousered, or almost mock-modest petticoated appearance. With the partridges, as such, I shall have nothing more to do at present; in their proper place they are all very well (it seems to be generally understood that they come best between joint and pudding), but in the scientific investigation on which we are now engaged they have no *locus standi*, and are hereby excused from further attendance.

The family split which resulted in the severance of the grouse-kind from the partridges must certainly have long antedated the days when Europe and America, parting hands at last, became two separate continents. That's the best of the modern evolu-

tionary method; it enables you to infer such a wonderful lot of minute facts about the previous history of every race whose structure and distribution you examine in detail. We know now pretty well that up to the very end of the Tertiary period, and the coming on of the Great Ice Age, a broad belt of land united Britain to the American coast, *viâ* Orkney, Shetland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland. But, at the time when this natural bridge still existed, there were already grouse-kind and there were already partridges, as distinct tribes, though, for a reason which I will hereafter more fully divulge, we may fairly conclude there were as yet no British red grouse, as distinct from the continental willow-grouse and ptarmigan. And what makes it clear that there were partridges and grouse-kind in the old northern continent before there was a separate Europe or America is just this—there are partridges and quails in Europe, and there are other partridges and quails in America, different in species, indeed, but all presenting the common peculiarities of the partridge and quail group; while there are also grouse-kind in Europe and grouse-kind in America, some of them different in species, but all presenting the common peculiarities of the grouse group as distinguished from the partridges.

What does this mean, in plain English, as interpreted by our modern evolutionary methods? Why, that, at a comparatively remote period, the great comprehensive grouse family, to which both groups belong, split up into two large subdivisions, members of both of which spread by land, on walking or flying tours, to every part of the then united northern continent. In America, with its wide prairie levels just adapted to their growth, the more primitive partridge type developed those handsome crested birds, the Californian quail and the Virginian quail, as well as the very American toothed partridges; in Europe, less fitted for such prairie fowls, it developed the familiar 'birds' of our own stubble and the common quail of the Mediterranean region. Meanwhile, the younger branch, which comprises the restricted grouse-kind, was evolving, in America, among the frozen northern forests, the Canada grouse, the pinnated grouse, and the snow grouse, while in Europe it was breaking up into the various groups represented by the capercaillie, the blackcock, the ptarmigan, the red grouse of Scotland, and the willow-grouse of the Scandinavian lowlands.

Why do I call the partridges the more primitive type, and treat the grouse-kind as a younger branch of this distinguished

family? Well, for a very plain reason. The two peculiarities which mark off the grouse-kind from the partridges—the feather-closed nostril and the pantalette legs—are special peculiarities in which these few species differ from all other birds; while in the partridges the corresponding organs exactly follow the common fashion. Therefore the grouse are the more specialised and the more derivative of the two—in other words, form a younger branch in the family tree. But in nature, we must remember, primogeniture is unknown; it is the younger branch that holds the place of honour, for the younger branch embraces, as advertisers always remark, all the latest improvements and additions.

What made the grouse get feathery legs and closed nostrils? Of what use were the changes? Were these alterations really improvements, as I have just hinted? In his particular position in life, undoubtedly yes! As a group the grouse-kind are more or less northerly forest feeders, seeking their daily bread among pine-needles and prickly heather, crowberry and juniper, because, as Dr. Watts philosophically remarks, 'it is their nature to.' Now, if their nostrils were open, the birds would always be pricking themselves as they fed, and the wounds thus produced would often set up fatal inflammation. So natural selection—that invaluable *deus ex machinâ* which forms the 'open sesame' of all knotty problems for the modern naturalist—would favour any chance variation that obviated this difficulty and enabled the bird as it browsed among its native heather to open or close its nostrils at will. (Of course, all birds breathe through the nostrils only.) As for the feathery legs, they have two objects—at least in the more northern species; and the grouse-kind are essentially a northern group, developed in and for the snow-clad region, 'adapted to the environment,' as per usual formula. In the first place, they keep the feet and toes warm in winter, and thus fulfil the function of woollen socks. In the second place, they act to some extent as snow-shoes, enabling the birds to walk more easily on the soft drifts without sinking in, as they must inevitably do if their feet consisted of bare, spindly toes, like those of the low-land partridge or pheasant.

Indeed, the scientific name of the special genus which includes the red grouse, the willow-grouse, and the ptarmigan is *Lagopus*, or 'hare-foot;' and everybody must have noticed the remarkable similarity between the foot of the hare and that of these hare-like birds of northern regions. Nay, more, in his summer dress, which

he assumes when the mountains are free from snow, the ptarmigan's toes are hardly at all concealed by the hair-like feathers; but in his winter coat, when the need for woollen socks and snowshoes becomes evident, the toes are almost concealed by the thick white plumage, and the whole foot forms a soft flat pad, which hardly sinks at all into the snow as the bird walks over it.

Now restricting our view once more to the members of the grouse tribe which are found in Britain or the adjacent parts of the continent, we find we have to deal here with three distinct types: first, the capercaillies; second, the blackcock; and third, the grouse genus proper, which includes the red grouse, the willow-grouse, and the ptarmigan. About each of these a few remarks may fitly be made by way of preface before we come down to our final subject, the special red grouse of our own Scotch and Welsh mountains.

The capercaillie, or cock-o'-the-woods, is the cock of the walk among the grouse tribe—the biggest, boldest, and most pugnacious member of the entire family. By habit he belongs to the ancient order of foresters; where the pine grows, there grows he; he is plentiful in the woodlands of all northern Europe, spreads into Switzerland, central Germany, and Hungary, and even reaches to the Pyrenees. But he objects to live far from the neighbourhood of snow. As a Briton, his position is somewhat anomalous. In early days, before the Saxon kern had subdued the Highlands, there were capercaillie in Scotland: but the advent of firearms killed them out, and for many years they were unknown as members of the British fauna. Some fifty years ago, however, a Marquis of Breadalbane was seized with the happy thought of reintroducing these noble birds; and under the stringent provisions of our modern game-laws the reintroduction proved highly successful. Still, most of the capercaillie that appear in the London market are even now Norwegians, and the species as a whole loves best the rigorous northern winter or the proximity of snowy Alps in more southern latitudes. In really warm or open-feeding districts the partridge and pheasant kinds beat all the grouse tribe fairly out of the field in the struggle for existence.

The most interesting point about the capercaillie, as about many other of its relations, is the curious way in which it deliberately sets itself to work to exhibit before our eyes the Darwinian principle of selective courtship. In the spring a capercaillie's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. So he seats himself on

a waving bough of his native pine-wood, and begins his *play*, as the keepers suggestively call it, for the sake of attracting the hen birds. From morning to night he keeps up his by no means very musical love-song, droning away at the top of his voice, and so absorbed does he become in the display of his own rasping vocal powers that he frequently neglects to observe the approach of his hereditary enemy, man, and so falls an easy prey to the treacherous bullet. For my own part, though not personally musical, I would scorn to take such a mean advantage over any gentleman engaged in showing off his voice to the weaker sex: but the Scandinavian gunner, above such prejudices, holds that all's fair in love or war, and ruthlessly pots the unhappy capercailzie at the very moment when he is congenially employed pouring forth his full soul, as the poet remarks, in profuse strains of unpremeditated art. I may add that the capercailzie's note is a most annoyingly persistent one; so that only this plea of want of premeditation can excuse him for making day hideous with his amatory effusions.

Not only does the capercailzie seek to charm his dusky mate by vocal efforts, however; he also has recourse, like the peacock and the argus pheasant, to personal display and strange antics, supposed to be attractive to the ladies of his species. In fact, as the Germans and Norwegians say, he waltzes. As he sings, he also dances; he puffs out his feathers into the wildest forms, and puts himself into strange æsthetic attitudes, like the officers in 'Patience,' when they find themselves cut out in the eyes of the fair by the unwonted competition of Messrs. Bunthorne and Archibald. For many days together the capercailzie holds forth on the same playing-ground; while his rivals gather round and sing and dance in emulation, as the enamoured brothers did in the Bab Ballads, to charm the heart of the theatrically minded young lady. At times, differences of opinion arise between the various suitors, which are settled off-hand in the orthodox fashion by 'law of battle,' where none but the brave deserve the fair. On the point of honour, too, the birds are touchy, the elder capercailzie never permitting the young cocks of the preceding year to trespass or 'play' within their own prescribed limit. Here we get, perhaps, the origin of property in land, as well as the first beginnings of the polygamic household.

For the capercailzie agrees with the Faithful of Islam in being a staunch polygamist, like most other birds among whom the stronger sex differs conspicuously in size or plumage from the

weaker; and it is the constant selection of the victors, the handsomest and most vigorous cocks, the best singers and dancers, by the harem of hens, that gives rise to these marked personal peculiarities of the male bird. The female is a smaller and much less notable fowl, sandy brown in colour, and destitute of the lustrous black plumage and handsome tail-feathers which have gained for her partner the proud old Scotch title of cock-of-the-woods.

The blackcock, own cousin of the capercailzie in less forestine woodlands, is another highly polygamous species, equally celebrated for the marvellous love-antics in which he indulges during the pairing season, and still more remarkable for the difference in colour between the two sexes, the grey-hen being a comparatively insignificant bird, of dingy hue, and unattractive plumage. Notice well the reason. The male birds have to outdo their rivals in beauty and in song, in order to get a chance of obtaining a harem; but they bear no part in the serious work of hatching the eggs, hardly even providing their numerous spouses with food while sitting. To them, therefore, conspicuous plumage is not merely a boast but a positive advantage. The hens, on the other hand, exposed to the attacks of birds of prey, require to assimilate as much as possible to the ground on which the nest is built, or rather loosely laid; and so well does their colour enable them to defy detection in this particular that it is almost impossible to see a sitting grey-hen till she rises some yards away from the nest which she has surreptitiously quitted. Decoration for the male, protection for the female, are the key-notes of coloration in all polygamous species.

Neither capercailzie nor blackcock, however, belong in the most restricted sense of all to the true grouse group, the genus *Lagopus*, which includes our British red grouse, as well as the Scandinavian willow-grouse and the common ptarmigan. These are the grousiest grouse of all, the kinds in which the wintry family spirit finds its truest avatar, the northernmost and snowiest types of a northern, glacial, and snow-loving race, circumpolar in origin, tastes, and habits.

Of these three birds, the willow-grouse, I believe, is the most original, or the eldest brother, and from it, I imagine, the other two more or less directly derive their origin. Who, then, is the willow-grouse, and what are the claims he can legitimately bring forward to this family distinction?

Strange to say, though you don't know the willow-grouse even by name, most probably, you have been eating him all your life long, as M. Jourdain had been talking prose, without ever knowing it. For the willow-grouse is (nine times out of ten) the large, hairy-legged, white-feathered bird sold by the mendacious or unscientific London game-dealer to the domestic economist under the trade name of ptarmigan. This is one of those nice little bits of abstruse knowledge calculated to render a man an insufferable bore at suburban dinner-parties; for if there is anything on earth that one's fellow-creatures won't stand, it's the impertinence of pretending to be acquainted with some fact of which they themselves are wholly ignorant. Nothing can be more inartistic than to tell anybody anything outright as if he didn't know it before; you should hint at it as something well known to your hearer, or at most remind him of it as a forgotten fact which he is sure to recall from the vast stores of his mental lumber-room the moment you give him the latent clue to it. Indeed, I apologise myself for thus bluntly springing the willow-grouse upon an unsuspecting world. I ought to have said: 'The willow-grouse, as every well-informed housewife must of course be aware, is the bird so commonly sold in London shops by the name of ptarmigan.'

Not, to be sure, that the licensed dealer in game desires to mislead you of malice prepense as to the nature of his goods: enlightened self-interest, that vaunted mainspring of commercial morality, would lead him, if anything, in the opposite direction; for the willow-grouse is really a much finer and better-flavoured bird than the relation whose name it has usurped for the purposes of commerce. The fact is, the game-dealer, not being a naturalist by trade, neglects the petty distinctions of genus and species. The true ptarmigan is a British bird, being found, though by no means abundantly, in the Scotch highlands. Thence, in the good old days of coaches and sailing packets, a few specimens used, no doubt, to reach London. Now ptarmigan are white in winter (when alone they are shot), and so are willow-grouse. When, therefore, a little later on, the influx of willow-grouse from Scandinavia, as imported, began to set in, the unsophisticated game-dealer, seeing they were white birds, called them at once, in the innocence of his heart, by the name of the only other white birds he knew, that is to say, ptarmigan. Therefore, the British householder must remember that whenever I speak here of willow-grouse I am really alluding to the creature he has always practi-

cally called ptarmigan : and that when I speak of ptarmigan I am really alluding to another animal, little known to him personally, if known at all, save as a rare apparition on some snowy hillside among the Scotch highlands.

The willow-grouse, then, or ptarmigan of commerce, which I take to be the nearest modern representative of the ancestor common to all three north European species of grouse, is in shape and size very similar to the red grouse, while in plumage, and especially in his habit of turning white in winter, he resembles rather the true ptarmigan. Moreover, he extends not only throughout northern Europe and Siberia, but also into the northern American snowfields, where ptarmigan and red grouse are equally unknown. This fact of distribution at once marks him out as the most primitive species of the three, because he must needs have reached his present stage of development while Europe and America were still united by a broad belt of land, whereas the ptarmigan and the red grouse seem to be later offshoots of the common stock, developed in and for special European habitats in accordance with circumstances which I shall examine later.

The sort of place where the willow-grouse lives is of the same type as that affected by the red grouse, only in more northern latitudes. In other words, he is a moorland and hillside rather than a strictly mountain bird ; the higher and barer peaks being occupied instead by that more specialised snow-loving form, the true ptarmigan, who can pick up a living where either willow-grouse or red grouse would fail to make both ends meet for their young family. Birch forest, interspersed with glades of underbrush and juniper, are his favourite haunt ; for there he can find good cover during the dangerous season while he is changing from his summer to his winter plumage or *vice versa*. Like all other grouse, these Scandinavian birds feed mainly upon young twigs, buds, and leaves, especially those of heather, birch, crowberry, and juniper. The aromatic flavour of the culinary 'ptarmigan' so esteemed by epicures is due, of course, to this mixed diet of very strong-tasted and savoury herbs.

Everything thus shows us at once that the willow-grouse is an essentially northern, almost arctic bird, and that he owes his origin to the coming on of that Great Ice Age, the Glacial Epoch. He must have been evolved before the ice reached its greatest extension, however, or else he could never have reached America ;

for his wings are far too feeble for such a long flight, and I don't doubt that he followed the old land route, *viâ* Shetland and Iceland, to Greenland's icy mountains, still marked by the long submarine sandbank that extends from Caithness to the American shore. In accordance with this northern habitat, the willow-grouse has acquired the common arctic trick of wearing in winter a white suit, undistinguishable from the snow around, while in summer he puts on a dark brownish coat, which harmonises exactly with the dead leaves and twigs and the stems of heather among which he lurks for cover. This protection has been mainly useful to him against birds of prey, who are the great enemies of the hens and the young birds during the spring breeding season. Throughout the short northern summer the willow-grouse remain in the breeding-places on the moors and lowlands, where food is plentiful: but as soon as autumn approaches they begin to pack, as sportsmen call it, and resort to the uplands, where they pass the winter in a very torpid condition, living on their wits, and on whatever other food they can manage to obtain by burrowing among the moss under the soft snow.

And now observe how differences of domestic arrangement affect the external appearance of birds and men. The male willow-grouse is no handsomer or more decoratively plumaged than the partner of his joys: in fact, the distinctions of appearance between cock and hen are reduced to a minimum. Why is this? as the late Miss Mangnall would ask. Simply because the willow-grouse, unlike those ornithological Turks, the blackcock and the capercailzie, is a pure monogamist of the first water, and a shining example of domestic fidelity. Now it is a known principle of the animal world that wherever polygamy prevails, there the law of battle and female selection encourage among the males the production of superfluous ornamental adjuncts; whereas, wherever strict monogamy is the rule of the race, both sexes alike, being protectively coloured, are dull and inconspicuous. It is a sad truth for the moralist to be compelled to formulate, but the most virtuous birds are invariably the plainest.

Of this glacial type, the true ptarmigan, I take it, is the most glacial development—a northernmost and peculiarly mountainous offshoot of the wintry willow-grouse. It inhabits, says Dr. Dresser, 'the more elevated, rocky, and barren localities, where it replaces the Scottish grouse and the willow-grouse, and it seldom or never descends to the lowlands, where these latter species have their

home, unless driven down by stress of weather in search after food.' The ptarmigan ranges, in fact, in smaller bodies than the willow-grouse, over larger areas of inaccessible rock. Being, therefore, much exposed to danger from birds of prey in open places, natural selection has ensured its being very protectively coloured; in other words, all those ptarmigan that could readily be seen have been eaten by hawks or similar enemies, and only those birds have been left to breed and reproduce their like which exactly matched the colour of the ground at all seasons. So admirably has this result at last been attained (by what somebody has boldly described as the 'masked beneficence' of the birds of prey) that one may walk through the very midst of a covey of ptarmigan, as they squat close to the ground, without ever so much as perceiving a single bird.

Moreover, the ptarmigan varies its garb with the time of year as regularly and religiously as the drapers in Regent Street. Not content with a single change, it goes in for separate winter, spring, and autumn fashions. During the height of summer, when the ground in its native mountains is free from snow, it becomes dark in hue to suit the surrounding rocks. In autumn, 'when the abundance of mosses and lichens gives a grey appearance to the country,' says Mr. Bowdler Sharpe, it dresses itself afresh in an ashy grey suit. And, finally, in winter, when the snow lies thick around, it hides itself sedulously in snow-white plumage. This treble change of hue every year is probably unexampled in any other bird or animal.

Ptarmigan are very large feeders, because they live on twigs of ling, crowberry, blaeberry, and other extremely innutritious foodstuffs, not even despising willow-leaves, rushes, sedge, and cottongrass. None of these can be accurately described as luxurious or unduly succulent viands. The natural consequence is that the poor birds have to spend most of their time in feeding, and the rest in digesting, in order to squeeze a livelihood out of their wretched pasture; so that they almost resemble, in this respect, the herbivorous animals that chew the cud. That, indeed, is why they exist as a special species at all; they are willow-grouse adapted, in the structure of their bodies and their digestive organs, to the most unfavourable and coldest situations, on the bleak and almost barren mountain-tops.

Our own red grouse—the familiar grouse of the Scotch moors and the English dining-room—is another variant on the willow-

grouse, which has proceeded in the exactly opposite direction from the mountain-loving ptarmigan. I don't doubt Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace is correct in his suggestion that our Scotch and Welsh grouse are the descendants of willow-grouse which entered Britain at the close of the Great Ice Age, and that the species has lost its power of turning white in winter 'owing to its long residence in the lowlands of an island where there is little permanent snow, and where assimilation in colour to the heather among which it lurks is at all times its best protection.' In short, it would seem to be an offshoot of the common northern willow-grouse, specialised for low moors in a warmer climate, as the ptarmigan is a similar offshoot of the same stock specialised for high and snow-clad mountain peaks.

The way the development of this true British species must have come about, it seems to me, would be something like this. In the very height of the Glacial Epoch, when the ice spread in a solid sheet over Scotland and England as it spreads to-day over the interior of Greenland, the willow-grouse, I fancy—already, as we know, in possession of the northern parts of both Europe and America—must have been driven south to France, Switzerland, and Italy, where, indeed, its bones are still discovered in the bone-caves of Dordogne of that chilly period, side by side with those of the arctic owl, the reindeer, the musk sheep, the bear, and the primitive crane. It was man who brought them in there—the wild skin-clad palæolithic hunter of the Great Ice Age; and by their side lie the rude stone arrows with which he shot them, and the chipped lance-heads which he employed against bear or mammoth. At this period the ptarmigan must have begun to develop on the higher mountains or nearer the limit of perpetual ice, and his remains, too, though in somewhat scantier numbers, are found among the bone-caves in France and Belgium.

Later on, when the ice began slowly to retreat, the arctic fauna, which had made its way into Southern and Central Europe during the hard times, set out on its travels to move north again behind the retiring glacier-sheet to its ancient haunts. The ptarmigan must then have entered Britain, over that great land-bridge of chalk down whose broken edges still stand up before our eyes in the white bluffs of Cap Blancnez and of Shakespeare's Cliff at Dover. At first, no doubt, these early immigrants occupied all the higher hills of England; but in time, as the weather improved from century to century, they retreated northward to

the most inhospitable Scotch hills, where alone they can still find a climate cold enough for their ascetic taste, and a diet suitable to their Spartan appetites.

After them, as the ice moved further and further north, and genial conditions began once more to prevail in northern Europe, the willow-grouse, too, must have started in their turn on their homeward journey. The greater part of the migrating stock must have slowly made its way, by insensible stages, summer after summer, towards Scandinavia, Lapland, Russia, and Siberia, where their descendants still live, true to the old type, as unmodified willow-grouse. But a smaller body of migrants would naturally penetrate, by the Isthmus of Dover, into what was then the peninsula of Great-Britain-and-Ireland, where they would occupy the Welsh, Scotch, and Antrim hills. I don't doubt that at first they found a good living also on Dartmoor and Exmoor, for both grouse and blackcock ranged much further south some centuries since than nowadays, and even as late as Gilbert White's time the last blackcock was seen in Wolmer Forest; but in these more southern hills both species are now long since extinct. Even in Scotland the willow-grouse would find the higher mountains already occupied by that earlier immigrant the ptarmigan, and would take by preference to the lower moors, where the ling and heather it loves grow abundantly. But as the habit of turning white in winter would here be a disadvantage to it (for whenever there was no snow a white bird would become an immediate and obvious mark for hawks and kestrels) natural selection would now discourage the change of coat, and would tend to fix the reddish-brown plumage throughout the whole twelvemonth. Indeed, the red grouse becomes even darker in winter than in summer, to match its background. The insular position of Britain in these latter days would effectually prevent crossing with the parent stock in Scandinavia, and would thus, to some extent, as Mr. Wallace has amply shown, favour the development of a new species.

In some such way, then, I believe, have circumstances evolved our only peculiar British bird, by, in, and for the British Isles, as a solace and consolation to overworked legislators, and a triumphant example of evolutionary method. And long may it wave! says the patriot epicure.

THE COUNTY.

CHAPTER XXIX.

INVITATIONS.

THE wheels of the carriage which brings Frances home are crunching the gravel outside; inside I am lounging over the drawing-room fire and paying the penalty of last night's excitement in every member of my aching body. I listen apathetically to the banging of the front door and the bustle of the servants; as the returning wanderer has made so very free with the house, and chosen to invite whom she will, I do not feel it incumbent upon me to rush out and fall upon her neck in ardent welcome. So I hug the fire even closer, and pick up a fresh volume of my novel with ostentatious indifference.

'Here you are!' cries Frances. 'Dear old thing! I am so glad to come back to you!'

And slipping down beside my low chair she envelops me in a furry embrace. Frances affectionate is an appalling sign; to touch the extreme corner of a cheek-bone is her normal idea of a sisterly caress.

'Your boa is in the fireplace,' I rejoin stolidly.

'You are looking very tired,' she continues, throwing her outdoor garments pell-mell around the room and crouching down upon the hearthrug close to my skirts. 'The ball last night was frightfully dull, wasn't it?'

'It was. I will pour out some tea for you.'

Whereupon I march away and trifle over the tea-tray, Frances following me, and trickling forth a stream of ingenious flattery. My house is so artistic and comfortable after Mrs. Stuart's ramshackle, Irishlike untidy abode; I was so lovely last night, that she was quite proud of being my sister; all the men were admiring me, and all the women were pulling me to pieces; my diamonds made Lady Dromore's family tiara look like a steel fender; my gown bore Worth's signature all over it, &c. &c.

When she pauses at last, even her cool effrontery a little dashed by the impassive reception of her various remarks, 'Well,

Frances,' I say listlessly, 'you are very polite this afternoon. What is it you want?'

Two big tears appear as if by magic in my sister's clear eyes; she has the gift of tears, and can weep copiously over nothing at all at a minute's notice.

'How hard you are to me, Esmé!' she murmurs reproachfully. 'I am in such trouble, and so lonely; I have no one to help and advise me, if you won't.'

I know she is fooling me, just as well as I know that she is sitting there. But her small face really does look very drawn and white this afternoon; she is all I have in the world—well, after Bryan, of course; and if I am miserable myself, is that any reason why I should make her miserable too?

Is not this a heaven-sent occasion for acting up to all those lofty resolutions which I make so freely in my good hours, and which have such a hideous trick of utterly vanishing from my mind at the moment of need?

'I don't want to be hard to you, dear,' and I stretch out a friendly hand; 'only I wish you would be more open with me.'

'Then I will be open with you,' cries Frances quickly, throwing her arms around me and pressing her cheek against mine. 'I will tell you everything. It is Allan Vaudrey who is making me so miserable. Oh! Esmé, I am so fond of him!'

I try to disengage myself, but Frances holds me tight and hurries on—

'Really fond of him for himself, not for his money—and I do think he likes me too; but I am afraid you will be so against it all.'

This affectionate position must be promptly abandoned. Frances can feel every beat of my heart against hers, and as it sounds in my own ears like a runaway steam-engine, she must have a pretty accurate guess at the breathless emotion which is choking me. So I push her firmly away and sink down into a chair behind me.

'Of course I do not forget that you liked him yourself ages ago; but so much has happened since then, and you have settled down so comfortably with Bryan, and—and yet, Esmé,' with clasped hands and tragic pose, 'if you tell me that you still love Sir Allan I will give up all thought of marrying him for your sake, however much I may suffer.'

'What nonsense you are talking!' I rejoin sharply.

'I shall be only too delighted if you will assure me that it

is nonsense. You have complained that I am not open with you. Now I have told you all there is to tell, and it is for you to decide.'

'To decide what?' I ask. 'It seems to me that this is a question for Sir Allan—not for me.'

Frances' face dimples all over—it never struck me before how conceitedly she can smile.

'Of course it is a question for Sir Allan. But I, for my part, could have nothing to say to him that would cause you unhappiness.'

'Make your mind quite easy on that score. You and Sir Allan can say what you like to one another. It won't affect me in the least.'

'Really and truly?' cries Frances, executing a delighted pirouette. 'Well, that's settled then. And he is coming here the week after next?'

'The week after next.'

'Bryan will shoot all the best coverts, I suppose. Don't you think we had better have a house-party?'

'No doubt about that,' I rejoin dryly. 'It would be a little difficult for the poor man to hit it off with the three of us *en famille*.'

'Whom shall we ask? The Lucans? The Sandford Somersets? The Fitzgeralds?'

But at each name I shake my head.

'I will not have any of that lot. Very likely they might be kind enough to come and take Bryan's shooting; but they have been too rude to us since we left Billington.'

'I dare say,' returns Frances, opening her eyes; 'but who has not been rude to us? You might as well retire to a desert island at once if you are going to cherish such an inconveniently long memory.'

'I wrote some notes this morning. There is a list on my writing-table.'

'Sir John Seymour, Colonel Beckett,' reads out Frances; 'they will come fast enough—they are never overburdened with invitations, whatever they may say. Miss Jolliffe, Archie Sinclair, Mr. and Mrs. Carslake. The Yarboroughs! Esmé, you are not in earnest. You haven't really written to them?'

'I have indeed; and the note is posted. I always told you I meant to ask them here.'

'But why, why, why?' cries my sister in an excited crescendo. 'What has induced you to saddle yourself with such an outrageous couple?'

'Because they saddled themselves, as you elegantly express it, with us for months together, at a time when no one else cared to remember our existence.'

Frances eyes me disgustedly.

'There is a strong element of priggishness in you, Esmé. However, if the note is really posted it is no use my saying any more.'

Bryan is wildly interested in his first shooting party.

He has hung around my writing-table the whole morning, and I have been glad that Frances was out of the way (having views of my own as to the guests to be desired); for, much as Bryan dislikes her, and slightly as he ranks her charms and graces, he yet has a profound admiration for her social tact and a high opinion of her diplomatic powers.

'When shall we get the answers to those invitations?' he speculates presently, his mouth full of plum-cake and his heart full of joy; he has returned from his afternoon ride in time for tea and picks up the conversation exactly where he left it off at lunch. 'The day after to-morrow, eh?'

'By return post from most of them, you may be sure,' answers Frances with a sneer.

'Why do you say that?' asks Bryan, turning uneasily towards the oracle. 'I should imagine, from what Esmé tells me, that they are all people with many engagements and little spare time.'

'I am sorry to disagree with Esmé,' says my sister politely, 'but if Colonel Beckett has a previous engagement when he is invited anywhere, it will be the first time I have heard of such an unusual event; and as for Sir John Seymour——'

'Didn't you tell me this morning that Colonel Beckett commanded the 100th Hussars and was a great friend of the Prince of Wales?' demands Bryan of me with a puzzled air.

'He certainly commanded the 100th Hussars once upon a time,' I rejoin firmly, and then tail off weakly into, 'and as for the Prince—well, of course I haven't heard his version of the friendship, but there is no doubt that Colonel Beckett got his regiment through him in some way.'

Bryan leans back much relieved, but Frances has not finished.

‘He had some appointment in India which would have brought him in contact with the Prince when he went out there ; and the worthy Colonel is such a terrible old bore that they gave him the 100th Hussars and shipped him home to get rid of him.’

She has not made much of a point as yet. The fact of Colonel Beckett’s connection with His Royal Highness, slight and unflattering though it be, is established ; and Bryan is satisfied.

‘We all know there is a good deal of jealousy about these things,’ he remarks, tolerantly. ‘But perhaps you were right, Esmé, in thinking that the blue room would do for Colonel Beckett. I proposed the white-panelled room this morning,’ explanatorily to Frances ; ‘there is no doubt it is the best single bedroom—but now I suppose we had better set it aside for Sir John Seymour, eh ?’

‘Don’t you think we might wait until we know who are really coming before we decide upon their rooms ?’ I suggest evasively.

It is trembling on the tip of Frances’ tongue to remark that Sir John will not recognise himself in so fine a chamber ; and were she not anxious to keep in with me just now, Bryan would be hotly informed that only the very waifs and strays of our acquaintance are being invited to his house ; and indeed, had it not been for the dire necessity of filling up a background to an awkward quartette, not even they would have been bidden to my table.

‘I should have liked a peer,’ says Bryan mournfully, helping himself to a large piece of buttered toast. ‘To have a lord staying in the house would have been very nice. I wanted Esmé to ask the Earl and Countess of Greyshawk. I know they used to be a great deal at Billington—I have heard the Rolands talk about them ; but she says it would not be etiquette to ask them here, as she has seen nothing of them since her marriage.’

His lament is interrupted by the appearance of Dixon, looming large and stately in the doorway. Dixon, unlike his master, has lived in houses with many lords, and, by delicate hints and dimly veiled regrets, frequently intimates how heavily the lack of their accustomed society weighs upon him.

He has brought in the afternoon letters, and hands them to Bryan and me with an impartial severity which relaxes perceptibly into an affable deference as he waves his silver tray in front of Frances. He looks upon her as a fellow exile with himself from their native sphere.

'That is from your mother, is it not, Bryan?' I ask, as I catch sight of the spidery handwriting and grocer-grey envelope which are the sole outward manifestation I have yet been vouchsafed of my husband's maternal parent, in spite of various lukewarm attempts on my part towards a nearer acquaintance. 'Shall I write and ask her to come to us on the 4th? It would be more amusing for her than staying with us when we are alone.'

'Certainly not,' returns Bryan, quite hastily for him. 'The old lady would be like a fish out of water. What does she want now, I wonder?' flicking open the poor, cheap, grey sheet.

I watch him curiously as he glances hastily over the closely written lines. An unusual frown is gathering on his brow.

'What does she say, Bryan? May I read her letter?'

'You wouldn't be able to make it out. What does she say? The usual thing of course. Wants more money—her dividends haven't been paid—owes her last quarter's house-rent. Upon my word, a fellow need to be made of money to stand all these claims upon him.'

'Poor old lady! You will send her what she wants, Bryan, won't you? How is it that her dividends have not been paid? What is her money invested in?'

'You would not understand if I told you, my dear child,' returns my husband pompously. 'You attend to your fallals,' with an important wave of the hand, 'and leave money matters to me!'

CHAPTER XXX.

WITH THE GUNS.

It is the morning of December 5th—grey, wet, and muggy. Four women, clad in typically British garb—sad-coloured Newmarkets, stout high boots, and sparsely trimmed hats—eye one another curiously in the outer hall at Milbourne.

'How hideous we all look!' I ejaculate discontentedly.

'Just like four men out of a Noah's Ark,' giggles Miss Jolliffe.

Miss Jolliffe is tiny, gay, and inconsequent. To compare her with a canary would be unjust to the mental ballast of a well-educated bird.

'We should look much worse in half an hour's time if we started in any other get-up,' avers Jacquetta.

'At any rate, let no man's gaze behold us,' I say persuasively. 'Let us go for a constitutional and keep out of the way of the shooting.'

'We can't do that,' declares Frances. 'They have arranged the whole beat for us to see Hackett's Wood shot, and we can't change our minds now.'

'The gentlemen would be so disappointed,' protests Jacquetta. 'Joseph always says he shoots twice as well when there are ladies looking on.'

I submit with more than resignation. Nowadays I am never in the same mind for two minutes together. At breakfast I proposed our going out to see the shooting; a minute ago I wanted to go in the opposite direction; but had they all agreed with me, I should have grown heavier and duller with each step that took us away from the guns, and spent the whole morning in inwardly cursing my waywardness.

Our guests arrived yesterday; three women—Jacquetta, Mrs. Carslake, Miss Jolliffe—and six men. I think I received them with decent smiles and due civility; I cannot have said anything very inappropriate or *mal à propos*, for they have none of them betrayed any astonishment at my demeanour. Indeed Jacquetta has complimented me upon my bearing.

'You have changed since your marriage,' she said to me last night. 'Your face has grown gentler, and you take more trouble to please.'

I am glad she thinks so—glad that my lunacy has not yet reached the fast-threatening pitch of making me utterly deaf to all voices but one, utterly unseeing of all but one presence.

Allan has arrived in a mood which my old nurse would have described as 'masterful.' From shunning me, he has suddenly gone to the opposite extreme of monopolising me with bold assertion. Whether he has been meditating upon my interrupted confidence at the Brackham Ball, or whether he is simply tired of treating me like a child in disgrace, I know not; but he has openly assumed a possessive air which thrills me with delight and terrifies me at the same time. Heaven help me if my prudence and propriety are to be the only bulwarks against scandal!

'I can't tell you how glad I am to see you so happily settled, my dear,' remarks Jacquetta, as we tramp along the beech avenue together. 'Mr. Mansfield was saying last night that he should always feel grateful to Sir Joseph and me for having brought

you together; and I am sure you ought to thank Providence for giving you such a model of a husband—so kind, so devoted!’

‘Bryan is very good to me,’ I respond with a sigh.

‘Marriage is a great lottery,’ pursues Lady Yarborough conversationally, ‘and it is not everyone who draws such prizes as you and I. The next thing is to find a second Bryan Mansfield for Frances.’

‘She is very young yet. This is our way, over this stile.’

‘Those shots seem very close,’ says Jacquetta uneasily. ‘Which way are they shooting?’

But she forgets her nervousness the next moment in the ecstatic sight of her Joseph, proudly elevated on a little knoll and blazing away recklessly right and left.

‘He will bring down some game too big for the bag,’ whispers Frances to Miss Jolliffe. ‘Look at that beater dodging from tree to tree. They ought to pick out a bachelor brigade for him.’

‘Mark!’ screams Lady Yarborough excitedly. ‘Look! that must be one of Joseph’s birds fluttering down there in the road.’

I positively envy Jacquetta her interest in her husband. Why am not I marking the birds of my legitimate gun and vehemently admonishing a small boy to pick up that running pheasant which he has winged, instead of anxiously squinting around the corner of the covert where a stranger in an iron-grey Norfolk jacket is dealing out slaughter and destruction?

‘Sir Allan is making the bag,’ murmurs Miss Jolliffe. ‘That is the third time he has wiped Sir Joseph’s eye.’

‘How happy they all look!’ says Frances. ‘And how degrading to be a woman! I shall shoot, too, as soon as I am married, but I don’t think it is good policy in a girl.’

As she speaks her eye glances critically over Major Johnstone, who has handed his gun to a keeper and is coming towards us.

With unerring *flaire* Frances has noted Allan’s change of manner, and is already preparing to herself a buffer wherewith to break her fall. I heard her tell Major Johnstone at breakfast that she considered woman’s mission in life was to keep a constant eye on the cook, and make man comfortable in the house; which appropriate sentiment awoke an immediately responsive thrill in the gallant major’s bosom, he being notoriously fond of his creature comforts!

'And I think a book ought to be kept with the *menus* of each evening's dinner carefully and fully written out, even to the sauces, so that there may be no monotony,' she concludes, with intent earnestness.

'By Jove,*yes! That's a good idea. But between you and me and this mustard-pot, Miss Nugent, it isn't often one finds a young lady with such sensible notions. Most girls seem to think tea and toast enough to live upon.'

He makes straight for her now, and it would not surprise me to hear that they discussed the relative merits of bread sauce and bread crumbs *à propos* of the pheasants he has just slain during the whole walk from Hackett's Wood to the copses which are to be shot next.

'You are walking in the wet, Mrs. Mansfield,' says Sir Allan's voice behind me. 'Come over here; this is quite a decent path.'

A decent path! It is a bumpy, slippery little track, from each side of which the long grass moistly swishes my petticoats—nevertheless, to my perverted taste, an Elysian promenade.

'How nice the rain on the grass smells!' says Allan, bucolically sniffing.

'I hate it! A nasty, green, damp, rural smell. The scent I like is the *odeur du pavé*—a nice towny, sociable smell—that suggests cosy theatre parties, and unlimited shopping, and heaps of people (always changing, so that one has not time to tire of them), and all that is going on in the world communicated *vivà voce*, so that one may be kept up in everything without ever looking at a newspaper.'

'Good heavens!' ejaculates Allan, as I pause rather out of breath.

'Ah! you are shocked. You think all good women love the country. For my part, I don't see why a woman should be any the better for having nothing to occupy her mind but pigs and poultry, and her neighbours' doings, and her servants' misdemeanours. I am sorry to lose the least fraction of your good opinion; but, if it is built upon any mistaken notion that I have innocently rustic tastes, its foundations are in the sand.'

I can hardly believe my own ears that I am thus easily chattering to Allan Vandrey, and that he is looking down upon me with an appreciative smile—that smile which tells a woman that any nonsense she may utter is pleasant hearing. We seem

suddenly and causelessly to have returned to our old positions with one another.

'As to one's good opinion,' says Allan with a laugh, 'I can't see that it is more merited by attention to the pigs and poultry than by devotion to society.'

Then with an abrupt change of voice he asks—

'You are fond of children, are you not?' After a moment's pause I answer him coldly—

'No,' and turning my head away gaze miserably over the dripping fields. For his question, and the tone in which it is asked, make a familiar ache, always dully present, spring actively to my throat and tighten it to pain.

Am I fond of children? Why not ask me if I am fond of other women's husbands or their lovers? Why should I care for *their* children? But a child of my own! Oh Heaven! how I would love it! How I should worship the little arms that would always stretch out to me; the little voice that would call me mother; the dear little body which would be to me so immeasurably more precious than anything in the world!

But the expectation, which many wise people have, that women of decent feelings should be devoted to children in the aggregate, always appears to me incompatible with my human nature at any rate. Allan stalks silently along—disappointed, perhaps, that I am again below the accepted feminine standard.

'But I have immense sympathy with anxious mothers,' I go on lightly, as soon as that horrid lump in my throat will let me. 'I think a woman absorbed in her nursery is certainly to be pardoned. The creature who sins beyond forgiveness is the woman who talks about her servants. Don't you agree with me?'

'Indeed I do,' says Allan energetically. 'She deserves an end like that of the weak-minded female who committed suicide the other day, being driven thereto by the worry of them.'

'Not really?' I ask, laughing.

'Really,' nods Allan. 'I saw the finding to that effect of twelve good men and true in print—so there can be no room for doubt.'

'After all,' I meditate dolefully, 'we should never laugh at anything a wretched *woman* lapses into. Poor creatures, women are, without occupation, without scope for ambition, without an individuality of their own even, identified as men's wives or

daughters, judged and classified according to their nearest masculine belongings, and placed here or there as the case may be, and told to amuse themselves. As if this world were a place for amusing oneself! The only solid, lasting happiness seems to me to come from work—and how are women to find work, educated and encouraged as they are to dawdle their lives away?’

Allan looks a little dumbfounded as I launch my diatribe at his head. He, poor fellow, has never had occasion to investigate feminine woes, and, like most motherless, sisterless bachelors, nourishes a vague idea that women’s requirements are always to be met by a little affection and a great deal of money.

‘How contradictory you are this morning!’ he exclaims. ‘First you enlarge upon the delights of running about town, and now here you are demanding a mission!’

‘I am not demanding a mission,’ I say, laughing a little at his puzzled face, ‘and I am not contradictory—wordy if you like; and yet not half so wordy as I could be upon the subject. But I would rather hear something of your plans than harangue you like this. What are you going to do? *You* ought to have a mission with all your money.’

‘Well, I want to do some good with it,’ he returns slowly; ‘but I am a little vague as yet. I must go carefully into the whole question—how the money is made, the condition of the workpeople in the North, and the state of the factories. Then I shall know exactly what surplus I have to work with.’

‘And then?’ I ask, half pausing in my walk, for we are nearing the copses. I am anxious to hear all about his work and his future. Will it become so absorbing, so interesting to him that he will forget me? I would not wish him to carry about with him in perpetual unrest that sick longing which torments me; but it will be hard to pass utterly out of his life.

Even while I look at Allan a change comes over his face. Cool consideration vanishes, and he bends his eyes on me with a passion there is no mistaking.

‘*Now* comes before *then*,’ he answers harshly. ‘Before I leave this place I am going to have it out with you.’

As we stand gazing at one another in the dripping rain, Frances and Major Johnstone pass a little to our right.

‘He was reading them extracts from the Police Manual,’ guffaws Major Johnstone, evidently trotting out his one ewe lamb of a story for Frances’ delectation.

'It is the funniest thing I ever heard in my life,' she responds, with a ringing laugh. But her face belies her words; the laugh is forced, and she casts a look of white apprehension towards Allan and me. The sight of her recalls the jealous tortures I have suffered.

'What are you going to have out with me?' I ask, with an uneasy smile. 'Do you want my consent to your flirtation with Frances?'

To which Allan vouchsafes no reply.

'You know you *have* been flirting outrageously with her,' I persist uncomfortably.

Still no answer.

'And indeed I have been trying to get accustomed to the idea of you as a brother,' I continue, in a lachrymously miserable voice.

'Good Lord! How can you stand there and say such a thing to me?' exclaims Allan suddenly. 'You know very well I have only been using her as a blind—I did not want to get you talked about!'

'Well, here we are at the copses,' I remark indifferently as the rest of the party join us, and pulling my umbrella over my face to hide the happy smiles which are breaking forth. 'Will it put you out if I stand here while you are shooting?'

'Not a bit,' he replies.

Nor does it; he shoots as straight as man can, and I, watching behind his arm, am more than ever convinced of the superiority of his sex. If I held the gun, and Allan were standing by me, though I were at other times the most brilliant, the surest of shots, yet on this occasion would the pheasants fly unharmed and the hares run scathless.

'I wouldn't talk so much to Sir Allan if I were you,' says Frances, when we are wending our damp way homewards, having left the men to the cheerless carouse of a stand-up lunch in the rain. 'You know people are so quick to make remarks. Miss Jolliffe asked just now if he was your own particular or merely a casual.'

'Vulgar little creature!' I interrupt angrily; and then refrain from further abuse of my guest, as it strikes me that Frances is probably only following the ingenious example of Mrs. Gamp in fathering upon her friend any little remark it does not suit her to own to.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TOO FOND A HUSBAND.

WHAT is it that Allan is 'going to have out with me'? What ashes does he want to rake up? There is no earthly good to be gained by harping upon the weakness which separated us, by tantalising ourselves with rehearsing the existence which might have been. There is nothing to 'have out with me.' He went away and left me; I married another man.

Not an heroic record on either side; what use to con it over? Allan would only say bitter things to me, and I—no weak Griselda at any time—should tell him that the man who deserts a woman, as he deserted me, has lost all right to reproach her.

No, it is a thousand times wiser to leave the past alone. Let us take all the sweetness we can out of life, and upon the ruins of our love build up a friendship firm, close, and enduring.

Allan must come and stay with us a great deal in the winter; in town we shall meet every day; when we go abroad he can always run over and join us.

I can get along very well for a while if I am sure of meeting him again at some given time—it is the uncertainty that kills.

Of course there will be talk about it; people do chatter so, and put horrible interpretations upon the most innocent trifles; but with Bryan always with me, no harm can really be believed.

It is not an ideal existence to picture to oneself; but it is the best that remains.

And not wrong. There would be nothing wrong about it. I should be a better wife to Bryan if my mind were more at ease and my nerves less on the stretch. I could say my prayers night and morning more peacefully if the one great desire of my heart were not always thrusting itself in unsatisfied longing between Heaven and me. Allan must never murmur one word which the whole world may not hear, never touch me with the slightest caress.

What wrong can there be in such a friendship?

So I argue with myself while a Babel of small talk goes on around me.

Frances is unusually quiet this evening; but Miss Jolliffe is as

conversational as a magpie, and Jacquetta rivals her in volubility, being much excited at the visible proof our establishment affords of her social tact and discretion.

'Lovely old silver, isn't it?' she observes to Sir Allan at dinner. 'I declare I am as pleased to look at it as if it were my own. When I think of that dear girl there,' nodding her large black head towards me, 'and the plight she was in this time last year, it does my heart good to see how perfectly happy she is now. She positively has everything one could desire. Mr. Mansfield tells me this old glass is priceless; they picked it up by chance in Venice when they were honeymooning.' Then, in sudden fear of having wronged her host, she adds confidentially—'Not that there really was much "picking up" about it, I expect; Bryan Mansfield is not the man to haggle over a few francs—and if there were any question of getting what dear Esmé fancied, he would not let money stand in the way.'

'Very devoted of him,' returns Allan with a sneer.

'Devoted! Ah, you may well say so! It is my belief he worships the very ground she walks upon,' exclaims Lady Yarborough with a tender sigh.

Why are fat people always so terribly sentimental?

'And happily all the devotion is not upon one side,' she continues. 'He told me last night that a fonder, more affectionate wife, man could not wish for.'

Allan, frowning without disguise, is angrily pushing the salt-cellar about in a way which augurs ill to the 'priceless old glass' in front of it. How foolish of him to mind Jacquetta's chatter! He must learn not to pay any attention to such nonsense.

'Oh no, no, you won't easily shock me,' cries Miss Jolliffe airily across the table. Sir John Seymour has been telling some slightly *risqué* anecdote, and has apparently been afterwards seized with remorse. 'I have just been staying in the fastest house in Perthshire—and you know that means a good deal. All the women came without their husbands, and the men without their wives; and they tossed me in a blanket on the lawn because I was the only unattached person there.'

'What does she mean?' whispered Jacquetta to Allan. Jacquetta's honest, middle-class mind has been considerably puzzled two or three times to-day by Miss Jolliffe; 'Does she mean that she isn't engaged to any one?'

Lady Yarborough confides to me afterwards in the drawing-

room, that she could not get any satisfactory answer from Sir Allan. 'But he agreed with me that Miss Jolliffe seems a little fast. I hope she won't have any bad effect upon Frances. Young girls are so easily influenced, and any talk about flirtations between married people is so very demoralising. Don't you think so, dear?'

Jacquetta has not forgotten sundry passages between Frances and Sir Joseph at Riverdale which did not meet with her approbation; but she will have no cause for jealousy now.

With cool determination Frances has already made clear to Sir Joseph the fact that she has no time to spare for dalliance with him. She has no further need of his house and his protection; therefore why waste her breath upon useless talk with so uninteresting a mortal?

It has not taken long to disenchant him. He was never in love with Frances, though very much in love with the reflection of his noble person which he was wont to behold in her flattering eyes. Since he arrived yesterday she has persistently turned a deaf ear to his lordly conversation, and has on two separate occasions deserted her chair when he has placed himself near her. Less than this would have damned her in Sir Joseph Yarborough's estimation.

'Poor little Francie's head is quite turned by your success, my dear Esmé,' he remarks, eyeing her contemptuously from afar; 'but if she wishes to attain to your position she must first discard her present flightiness of manner.'

No one else would accuse Frances of flightiness at the present moment. She is seated in a high-backed chair, and is gazing up at Major Johnstone with Madonna-like gentleness of expression.

She has been hard at work upon her fluffy fringe, which is much less pronounced than usual, and a black gown finishes the metamorphosis from the frisky damsel of yesterday into the staid English maiden of to-night.

She came into my room before dinner to borrow the aforesaid garment; her own wardrobe does not include a black frock, and we can always wear each other's clothes.

'He told me this afternoon that he thought women never looked so well as in black,' she informed me; 'he evidently likes them to bear the impress of domestic virtues written all over them. Well, I have damped my hair, and I am going to part it in the

middle—and, by the way, Julie, you go and tell Dixon that I will come down presently and mix the salad myself for dinner.'

Already her voice had assumed a mild whine, and the corners of her mouth were decidedly pulled down—usually they curl up on her cheek in a most impertinent fashion.

Her efforts are crowned with success. Major Johnstone is minutely describing to her each hole and corner of the place which came to him with his grandmother's money, and is asking her opinion as to whether a small room over the ice-house should be used as dairy or larder.

She is voting in favour of the larder, when Allan makes his way across the room to me.

'Come and show me the books in the white library,' he whispers persuasively.

But I shake my head. Though bearing the most inviting aspect, with two roaring fires casting changeful lights upon the many-coloured volumes which line its walls, the white library is tenantless. I dare not march into it alone with Allan.

'Do,' he begs. 'Please do. I particularly want to talk to you.'

'And I want to talk to you; but I won't go in there now. You may come for a walk with me to-morrow morning if you like.'

'All right,' with eager assent. 'At what time?'

'I will be ready at half-past eleven in the hall.'

Allan tugs reflectively at his moustache. 'I am afraid of your sister cutting in if we start from the hall,' he remarks ungallantly. 'She is watching us now.'

So she is, with stolen side-glances, and is straining her ears to catch what we say, if I mistake not.

'I will be in the peach-house at a quarter to twelve,' I murmur, under cover of a burst of laughter from the other end of the room, where Archie Sinclair, with the aid of two candles and a large sheet of kitchen paper, is drawing Miss Jolliffe's profile on the wall.

'Come, Esmé, and be done too,' calls out Bryan. 'It really is a wonderfully good likeness.'

As I join him obediently he strokes my cheek with his forefinger, and says—

'Not that black and white could ever do justice to this,' in maudlin tenderness.

Now I have insisted upon a distinct understanding with Bryan that there are to be no affectionate demonstrations in public. In private I submit to his endearments with what patience I may; covenanting only that he is not to touch the tip of my finger before other people. I have obtained this from him by emphatic assurances that the slightest caress is extremely bad form; but the delightful excitement of his house-party has, unhappily, driven my injunctions from his mind.

‘Eh, Sir Allan? A black-lead pencil and a piece of white paper won’t give any idea of all this pretty flesh and blood, will they?’ patting my chin and neck with fond proprietorship.

I jerk myself wrathfully away, nearly knocking over Miss Jolliffe, who is staring open-mouthed at Bryan’s blandishments.

‘How touching!’ she exclaims, with her light, twittering laugh. ‘How edifying! And how long have you been married?’

‘Nine months,’ says Bryan solemnly; ‘and let me tell you, Miss Jolliffe, I have never regretted my marriage for one single instant. It was the wisest thing I ever did in my life.’

And, pulling down his white waistcoat with emphatic assertion, he looks proudly upon his shrinking chattel and the assembled company. Bang—bang goes the door behind us! Sir Allan Vaudrey has left the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ASSIGNATION.

ALLAN is waiting for me at the door of the peach-house—waiting in anxious impatience, for it is five minutes past twelve and I am twenty minutes late. Frances has been sticking to me like a leech ever since breakfast, and Bryan has been worrying for instructions as to the disposal of his guests.

‘Leave them alone,’ I have adjured him with repeated insistence. ‘If you want people to enjoy themselves, leave them alone.’

‘But there’s Miss Jolliffe sitting all by herself in the hall,’ he rejoined on his last irruption into my boudoir. ‘Don’t you think I had better ask her to go for a walk with me?’

‘She won’t thank you if you do; she is hanging about until

Archie Sinclair comes out of the smoking-room, on the chance of his asking her to play billiards.'

'Oho! that's it, is it?' exclaimed my husband, looking very knowing. 'Well, then, I shall see if Colonel Beckett would like to go over the Home Farm.'

'Yes, do.'

Some victim must evidently be offered on the shrine of his fussiness, and why not Colonel Beckett? After all, I think he will probably enjoy his morning walk. Bryan is an excellent listener, and will not discover any inaccuracy in the extraordinary statements with which the gallant soldier invariably garnishes his conversation—not even if he informs him, as he did me at breakfast, that he dined out thirteen times last week.

Frances has been more difficult to shake off; but at length I have evaded her and am hurrying along the holly walk which leads to the peach-house, fastening my fur coat as I go.

'Thank Heaven!' exclaims Allan with unnecessary fervour, as I complete my hasty garbing under his eyes and thrust my cold fingers gloveless into my muff. 'I was beginning to give you up, and if you had not come I should have marched indoors and asked the reason why.'

'You must not be so impatient,' I chide, smiling up into his face, and wondering within myself at the comfortable sensation of being so happily at home which suddenly takes possession of me. What a terrible power it is which makes every action, every word, every gesture even of Allan's, fraught with interest to me and full of matter for thought! Nothing less than an aberration of one's faculties can cause the very wave of the hand of another human being to be so absorbing a subject for reflection!

'I have been patient too long,' says Allan, answering my smile with a frown. 'It would have been better for us both if I had been more impatient a year ago.'

'Oh, a year ago!' I exclaim with a deprecating shrug of the shoulders. 'What is the use of talking about a year ago? It will only make us very cross.'

We have left the kitchen garden and are pacing along the laurel walks which lead out to the park.

'Never mind,' says Allan, unheeding my remonstrance. 'I want you to tell me yourself, with your own lips—and not through another person this time—how you could have had the heart to throw me over so suddenly. For it was sudden; you cared for me

that morning we walked to Riverdale station together—I'll swear you did!'

'I throw you over! How can you say so? It was you who threw me over. Of course I cared for you!'

'Then you did not send me that message?'

'What message?'

'Telling me not to come and see you any more.'

'I never sent you such a message. Who said so? Who said so?'

'Sir Joseph Yarborough of course.'

'Sir Joseph Yarborough!' And panting with excitement, my breath coming short I turn and face Allan, 'I never sent you any message through Sir Joseph Yarborough. How could you think I would do such a thing?'

'You never sent me any message through Sir Joseph Yarborough?' repeats Allan, turning very pale. 'You never asked him to tell me to keep away?'

'Oh, Allan, there has been some horrible mistake!' and breaking down I suddenly burst into tears.

But Allan shakes me roughly by the arm.

'Don't cry,' he says harshly; 'but listen to me. The very morning after my father was buried Sir Joseph came to see me, asked how I was placed, and, when he found that I had only 10,000*l.*, begged me in your name not to give you the needless pain of refusing to marry me.'

'In my name!'

'Yes, in your name. Do you mean to tell me you knew nothing of his request?'

'This is the first I have heard of it. How could you be such a fool as to believe him?'

'He was so circumstantial,' groans Allan. 'I questioned him over and over again, and only became more convinced that you must have told him everything. He alluded to my walk with you that morning and said that he hoped I would not press any advantage or admission I might have obtained from you at a moment when your feelings towards me were excited by compassion.'

'Why, he must have been eaves-dropping! I never told him anything.'

'Did you tell anyone about it?'

'Only Frances. Ah—h! I see it all now!'

And, with lightning-like quickness, words, gestures, looks that have puzzled me for many a long day become clear to my mind.

‘Frances is at the bottom of it all!’ I remember her constrained manner that day when Sir Joseph Yarborough went up to London; her fright when she heard of Allan’s return from India and arrival at Mrs. Stuart’s; her attempts to keep us apart—attempts which seemed successful at first and which have been growing fainter as she becomes convinced of their uselessness.

‘Frances!’ repeats Allan incredulously. ‘What motive had she for interfering?’

‘She did not want me to marry a poor man. She wanted me to marry Bryan.’

‘That was another thing Sir Joseph told me,’ continues Allan bitterly; ‘that you had said you would rather marry Mansfield than be dragged into a long engagement with me.’

‘Oh, Allan, how *could* you believe such things of me? I would not have believed anything other people said about you. I would have insisted upon seeing you myself.’

‘It is very easy to say that, and of course I see now that I was a fool; but at the time I had no doubt whatever that Yarborough was speaking the truth.’

‘He thought he was,’ I cry eagerly, ‘and that made him all the more effective a messenger. I can trace Frances’ finger throughout. She primed Sir Joseph and he went off to you, genuinely believing everything he said. He has not wit enough to be a good hypocrite.’

Allan here consigns my sweet sister to perdition, with an oath not loud but deep. As for me, I have not time to waste over her; I am not surprised at anything she has done—I know her so well—and I will deal with her afterwards. Just now I am all absorbed in the plot which has robbed me of happiness, and I question Allan lengthily and minutely.

‘You had always told me how much you thought of money and everything it represented,’ he says presently. ‘You had never pretended to be indifferent to the good things of the world. I had always seen you surrounded with every possible luxury and had always known that you wanted to make a good match. All this came back to me when Yarborough said you had declared that you could never stand love in a cottage.’

‘Oh, Allan, if I have been worldly I am bitterly punished for

it! How much happier I should have been with you in the poorest hut!’

‘It is very easy to say that now,’ he repeats bitterly.

‘Indeed I never doubted it!’ I exclaim eagerly. ‘Don’t be hard upon me. Really and truly I had not one thought of marrying Bryan until I heard you had gone to India—and I felt so forsaken! You know I had nowhere to go, and I was very uncomfortable in Sir Joseph’s house.’

‘Poor little darling!’ says Allan, relenting.

Then we walk along in sad silence. The ‘might have been’ is dangling so tantalisingly before our eyes.

‘At least I am very thankful to know the truth,’ I say at last. ‘You can’t imagine how it has hurt me to be compelled to think badly of you. I almost feel as if you had been given back to me.’

‘I know the feeling,’ he rejoins quickly. ‘I left England cursing you, your worldliness and your weakness; never doubting a word Yarborough had said. But the more I thought about it the more puzzled I grew. The look in your eyes and the smile of your mouth kept haunting me until I felt that if you were indeed as false as I had been told I could never believe in human faith and love again.’

‘Poor fellow!’ I murmur softly.

‘So I came here to see how you were taking things, before I settled to my work in the North.’

‘Thank Heaven that you did!’ I exclaim. ‘And now you must never leave me for long again.’

Allan shoots a quick glance at me, but says nothing.

‘I don’t want to interfere with your work or to keep you always dangling at my apron-strings,’ I continue, with quite a cheerful laugh—the plan of intimate friendship I have sketched out recurring consolingly to my mind; ‘but you must come and see me very often, and when you are away you must write to me and tell me what you are doing. So that, whenever we are obliged to say good-bye for a little while, we shall know that it will not be long before we meet again.’

No response from Allan. Surely he does not think me forward?

‘You can’t be working for ever, you know,’ I urge; ‘you will be obliged to take some holidays, and they must always be spent with us. You must send your horses here in the winter—Bryan

will be delighted to put them up. Then you must run up to town a little in the season—you will get so rusty if you don't—and we shall be there of course.'

Still no answer. Allan does not like my plan. He must like it. He must!

'I will take such interest in your work, Allan,' I plead, my voice beginning to quiver in my anxiety. 'You will tell me everything you are doing, and perhaps I may be able to help you in some parts of it; there are often little things that a woman sees quicker than a man—and I would think of nothing else.'

I raise my hand to his coat sleeve, but he turns his head away.

'You are imagining perhaps that Bryan would not like it; but indeed you are mistaken. He would not mind in the least—why should he? He is not at all jealous or suspicious—and indeed what would there be for him to suspect? He will always be pleased to see you—Why don't you answer me? You *must* do what I want. Oh! Allan, don't be unkind to me—I am sick and tired of suffering, and I cannot live without you!'

'Nor I without you!' exclaims Allan; and turning round he seizes me in his arms. 'But what a child you are to propose such a plan to me! No, no, my darling! my way is ever so much better. You must come with me and be my very own.'

With all my strength I endeavour to free myself from his grasp, but he holds me firm, and I only succeed in so far drawing back that I lean against his hands, which are clasped behind my waist, and look up into his eyes.

'Don't, Allan, I beg and implore you—don't say anything like that to me again. It will only separate us for ever!'

'Nonsense!' he says roughly. 'We have been tricked and deceived. We must do the best we can for ourselves now. Trust yourself to me, my own love, and you shall never regret it; you shall be as happy as the day is long.'

And he tries to draw me closer to him, but, placing my hands against his shoulders, I resist firmly.

'I should never be happy if I did such a wicked thing as that.'

'Then you don't love me as I love you,' with an impatient shake.

'We are different, I suppose,' I sigh; 'I should be perfectly miserable if I did what I knew to be wrong. But, dear, there is

no harm in what I propose—and we should be a great deal together. *Please* do what I ask you,' with a piteous attempt at coaxing.

'It is quite impossible,' says Allan firmly; 'I wonder you don't understand that. How could I stand by and smile when you are that fellow's wife? Any man would tell you the same.'

'Then I think you are very selfish,' I cry, falling to abuse in my trouble and despair. 'You know how utterly miserable I am, and you refuse to give me the least help or comfort.'

'I refuse to give a promise which I have not the power to carry out. The position you propose is impossible. I ask you to come with me, and if you will not I must go alone.'

'Allan, you *know* we should not be happy.'

'I should,' he returns doggedly. 'I should be happy with you anyhow and anywhere!'

I am mute in utter hopelessness—not wavering one hair's breadth in resolution, but tortured with grief. Allan takes my silence as a sign that I am yielding, and suddenly bending down kisses me passionately on the mouth. As his lips touch mine a thrill so responsive tingles through me that I tear myself from him in sudden alarm; if he kisses me again I shall lose all power of resistance, I shall do whatever he bids me.

'Let me go this instant! I mean it. Let me go!' I cry violently.

Slowly and grudgingly he opens his arms and releases me.

'I do not ask you to stay now,' I pant, moving backwards and placing the width of the path between us. 'You had better go—and at once!'

Happily for me, Allan mistakes my agitation and imagines, with true masculine penetration, that I am simply angry at being kissed!

'I beg your pardon,' he says, in a tone which he endeavours to make formal, but which is merely furious. 'I will not offend again, and I will leave your house at once. Mr. Mansfield ought to be complimented on the extremely correct behaviour of his wife.' And raising his hat he turns on his heel and leaves me.

'Oh, Allan, don't go in anger!' rises to my lips; but I check the exclamation in time. I am too weak to provoke a second encounter.

(To be continued.)

